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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 64 June 2002

Looking ahead - a message from the President

Over the past six months, the Club has seen many exciting changes, both in terms of accommodation and staffing. All in all, the future is looking brighter than it has for many years, but there is still a lot of hard work to be done to reach our final goal.

No. 21 Regent Terrace was bought with part of a £4000 gift given by an anonymous donor in 1959. Initially the property was held by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Endowment Trust, but in 1986 ownership was transferred to the SOC, who had previously occupied it on a full-repairing lease. Originally conceived as a centre where all aspects of Scottish ornithology could be housed under one roof, this concept required a major rethink once the RSPB, FIBOT and all other occupants left. One thing became clear, however, and that was that the SOC and the Scottish Centre for Ornithology had become inextricably linked - an important aspect of Council's 2000 definition of the concept.

During 1999-2002, the Club developed, and is now implementing, the strategy whereby the building would be sold and the proceeds spent on establishing and maintaining a new, sustainable centre that was fit for the 21st century. This was, after all, our obligation under the 1986 Trust Deed, whereby we were given the property in 1986, which Council takes very seriously.

In January, 21 Regent Terrace was put on the market, and six weeks later, after considerable interest in the property, an offer for well over £800,000 was accepted. In late March, the sale was finalised and the SOC moved out on 28th March 2002.

Before a new centre could be found, it would be necessary for the Club to find temporary accommodation (as endorsed at the 2001 AGM). In March, we moved into three rented rooms in Harbour Point, Musselburgh, close to Fisherrow Harbour. One of the major tasks of the move was to pack the prestigious Waterston Library, which occupied a significant part of 21 Regent Terrace. The extensive collection of c.10,000 books and journal volumes and archives were packed into 700 boxes for storage. Thanks must go to the moving team Bill Gardner, Gordon Anderson, Caroline Scott and Jill Andrews who carried out the move rapidly and efficiently, and to all the volunteers who gave their time to help. You can imagine the superhuman effort needed to pack, move, re-move and then store 700 heavy boxes of books and papers!

Harbour Point, inside and out.

Inside, our Musselburgh office is modern and well equipped. From here, the Club will co-ordinate membership activities and publications and offer support to the branches. Unfortunately, the library will effectively be inoperative while we are at Musselburgh and only now is the office running at full efficiency, following the paucity of continuity over the past year.

In addition to the move, important staff changes have also taken place. Last year, the Club established the new post of Development Manager, and in November 2001 Bill Gardner MBE was employed. During his first six months in the job, Bill has already proved his worth. Not only has he ably organised and implemented the move, he has also built up a considerable knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses, and has a large number of excellent ideas on how to take the Club and the concept of a new centre forward.

More recently, in mid March, the Club employed Caroline Scott as its new Administration Officer. Although joining us just before the move, Caroline is rapidly getting the new office into shape and becoming familiar with the many tasks involved. Caroline is assisted by Jill Andrews on a part-time basis.

Staff, Council, Management Committee and other volunteers are now working towards several ambitious goals - (1) to establish the new, sustainable centre and HQ, (2) improve facilities offered to members, particularly through the branches and (3) review publications. Please encourage others to join the Club, and most importantly consider what you can offer in the way of help - we rely heavily on volunteers to maintain the ever-expanding level of membership benefits at a reasonable cost.

Council now has firm views on what the new centre should comprise, but finding a suitably prestigious location is proving more difficult, being totally dependent on suitable sites becoming available. It has been decided that the centre should be located at a birdwatching site, with all year round interest, that birdwatchers from all over Scotland would be prepared to travel to - or preferably that they travel to already.

The search for this ideal site is proving difficult, but is now centred on the Firth of Forth area in general. In terms of facilities, the outline plan includes provision for a meeting and recruitment centre (open at weekends with refreshment facilities), a hide (or hides), the Club office, the Waterston Library and archive, holiday accommodation of some sort, and much more. Clearly, if we achieve our goal, the centre will be something the Club can be proud to have re-established.

Progress had been rapid, but unfortunately legal difficulties over the interpretation of the 1986 Trust Deed, mentioned above, have meant that time, money and effort are regrettably having to be diverted away from our main goal.

It is not easy to predict how long it will take to develop the new centre and Club HQ, but Council will endeavour to keep members informed, both through regular *SBN* articles and updates on the Club website.

Ian Andrews, President

Editorial

Firstly, our fullest apologies that this is the first copy of *SBN* since issue 63 in September 2001, a full eight months ago. You will read elsewhere about the many changes the Club has gone through recently. As well as staff changes, Martin Collinson, *SBN* Editor since June 2000, had to step down at short notice owing to a change of job, and a replacement Editor could not be found to complete the December issue on its normal schedule. It was decided that the December 2001 and March 2002 issues would be combined and mailed to members as early as possible, but this meant bringing on a temporary editorial team. I have volunteered to hold the reins for this issue only, supported by Bill and Caroline in the office, to help bring schedules back on track. As I write, we are still searching for a new Editor (see below).

This issue has been compiled and edited by both Martin and myself, but Council has decided that the desktop publishing and printing work to produce the final article would now best be done by outside specialists, rather than in-house. This frees our staff up to concentrate on serving the membership and developing the Club. We have chosen Pica Design of Aberdeenshire. This company is run by Harry Scott, a well known birder and one of the initiators of *Birding Scotland*, a quarterly topical journal available by mail order. We hope this will be the first of many complementary activities between the SOC and *Birding Scotland*.

Included with this issue is the December 2001 issue of *Scottish Birds* and a supplement, *The Birds of St. Kilda*. You should also find a list of summer branch outings. Please contact HQ if any of these are missing. Extra copies of *The Birds of St. Kilda* can be ordered for £7.00.

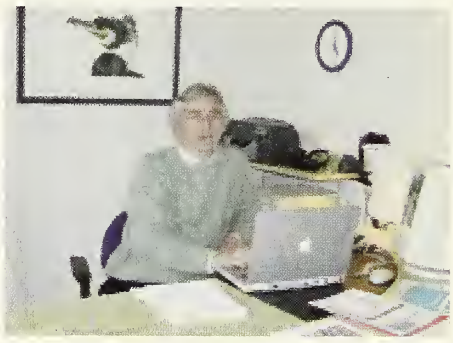
It is intended that the next issue will be in September 2002, in time for the first of the autumn meetings. This mailing will include the June 2002 issue of *Scottish Birds*, details of the winter programme and the Annual Conference, and the *Scottish Bird Report* for 2000. After that, publications should be back on schedule.

Wanted - New Editor for *Scottish Bird News*

The job of *SBN* Editor is focussed on seeking and assembling topical bird related articles and developing the content to appeal to a broad section of our membership. There is no requirement for the Editor to live close to Edinburgh or Aberdeen, as most communication is now done electronically. It is intended that there will be more Club related information coming from HQ, and more information and feedback from the branches, in particular keeping members informed about current local initiatives. Bill Gardner has compiled a document describing the job in detail. Even if you don't have a computer with e-mail, the Club may be able to offer financial assistance to a keen and committed prospective Editor. If you are interested in finding out more, or know someone who might be interested, please contact myself in the first instance on 01578-760239, e-mail mark.holling@btinternet.com, or via HQ at Harbour Point.

Mark Holling

STAFF PROFILE - Development Manager Bill Gardner,



Bill Gardner joined the SOC as Development Manager in November 2001. Bill is 54 and moved to North Berwick to live in 1987, with his wife Ann, and their two teenage boys David and Jonathan. Bill spent seven years in London as Manager of the BBC TV Computer Graphics Workshop, where he managed complex, live Information Graphics software development projects for Election Results coverage and Weather Reporting. He received a British Computer Society Award for his work on the BBC TV UK Weather reporting system in 1985.

Prior to joining BBC TV Bill was a Research Fellow at Strathclyde University working within the Architecture Department on building visualisation and man-machine interaction.

In the 1990's he built up a design-based business in North Berwick and also was the creator and main fundraiser for the award winning Scottish Seabird Centre at the harbour. In 2002 he was awarded an M.B.E. for this work.

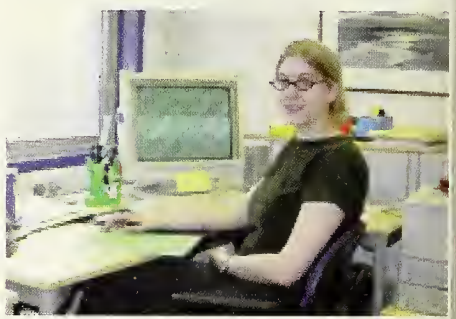
Bill has been a keen bird watcher since boyhood and has become an enthusiastic photographer of bird behaviour. He feels that he has many of the skills needed to help the SOC move forward confidently into the 21st century. In his first 5 months with SOC he has managed the sale of 21 Regent Terrace, the packing of 700 boxes, containing 24 tons of books & archive. In addition he has negotiated the lease and equipping of a brand new office complex at Musselburgh, plus the recruitment of another key member of staff, Caroline Scott, our new Admin. Officer.

He has extensive experience of design and print technologies and is reviewing the publishing and commercial activities of the SOC.

Bill is currently evaluating sites and strategies to make the dream of a national centre for birdwatching , including a new HQ for the SOC and its Waterston Library, a reality.

Many of you will now have met Bill at branch meetings and conferences over the last winter, and he looks forward to meeting many more of you over the next year.

STAFF PROFILE - Administration Officer Caroline Scott,



Caroline has more than six years experience within the museum and heritage sector, caring for a variety of objects and archive collections. Alongside her work in museums she has built up a wealth of experience in office administration roles.

Over the last few years she has been closely involved in securing Heritage Lottery Fund grants and other funding for various museum and archive projects.

One of her previous posts was as Archive and Museum Officer at Heriot-Watt University where she planned and implemented the move of two high profile archive collections to new and better stores. Other previous roles include Collections Documentation Officer at Stockport Council and Curator of Scotland's Secret Bunker in Fife.

In her administration roles she has initiated projects to streamline office procedures, upgrade software packages and generally make everyone's job a little easier!

Caroline graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 1998 with an MA honours degree in Celtic Civilisation and English. Then in 1999 she completed a postgraduate qualification in Museum and Gallery Studies at the University of St Andrews.

Caroline looks forward to helping out and meeting many of you in the future.

News from the AGM and recent council meetings

(Please note: a version of this article also appeared in the news sheet sent to members in February 2002. Ed.).

The 65th Annual General Meeting of the SOC was held during the Annual Conference at Newtonmore on 27th October. This brief note updates members on the decisions taken both at that meeting, and at Council meetings since.

At the AGM, the following officers of the Club were elected unopposed: Ian Andrews, President, and Mark Holling, Vice-President. Although no nominations for the posts of Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer were received by the required deadline of 31st July, two volunteers had since come forward, but will require formal election at a future AGM. They have both since been ratified by Council. Accordingly, the SOC Honorary Secretary is Russell Young of the Central Scotland Branch, and the Honorary Treasurer is Janet Crummy of the Highland Branch.

After much useful discussion about the proposed changes to the Constitution, the recommendations of Council were carried by the required majority. Details were presented in the last *SBN* and an updated constitution has already been sent to members. The main change is that the number of members on Council has been reduced and branch representatives now meet separately as part of the new Regional Committee, which will provide more opportunity for branch issues to be discussed and actioned. The first meeting of this committee was held in March at Vane Farm and from that meeting two representatives were chosen to represent the committee on Council.

Membership of Council is as follows:
Donald Watson, Honorary President
Ian Andrews, President and Chairman
Mark Holling, Vice-President
Russell Young, Honorary Secretary
Janet Crummy, Honorary Treasurer
Elected members: Ken Shaw (retires at 2002 AGM), Alistair Lavery (2003) and Andy Thorpe (2004)
Angus Smith, Regional Committee Chairman
Ian Thomson, Regional Committee Vice-Chairman
Bill Gardner, Development Manager (non-voting).

Due thanks were given to our departing President Brian Downing and our long-serving Treasurer, Peter Vandome. Jim Mattocks proposed a vote of thanks to Brian and Peter was presented with a book for his efforts. Gratitude was also expressed for the many volunteers at Regent Terrace who had put in additional time since Sylvia's departure in April.

Mark Holling, Vice-President

The first Regional Committee Meeting

The first meeting of the newly formed SOC Regional Committee met on 10th March at Vane Farm RSPB reserve near Kinross. Unfortunately, the morning of the 10th turned out to be one of heavy snowfall in many parts of the country, which prevented many delegates attending. All branches except Orkney were to have had representation at the meeting, but in the event a further seven branches were unable to attend. Nevertheless a very constructive day was held and this forum will now be able to spend time discussing and addressing branch issues and helping each other develop. All members of branches should make full use of your Branch Representative to take ideas forward. Don't worry if you live in an area without a branch - how to reach out to members such as yourself will be considered by this committee as well!

Angus Smith of the Central Scotland branch is the first Chairman of the Committee, with Ian Thomson of Lothian his deputy and Vice-Chair. Another meeting is scheduled for 11th August, again at Vane Farm, and a further update on the activities of the committee will be provided after that.

South East Scotland Discussion Group News

The SOC "Discussion Group" organised by the Lothian Branch has met in Regent Terrace since the SOC first moved there in 1959. The group has met in the library each month during the winter months all this time and has covered in depth many topics of ornithological interest. Mostly discussion centres around recent and forthcoming surveys, both local and national, using the collective expertise of the 15-25 members who regularly attend. Local conservation issues are also covered and feedback given to planning authorities or conservation bodies. Some members travel some distance to the meetings and currently, as well as representation from East and West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh, we have six members from the Borders including two from near St Abbs on the Berwickshire coast, and one from the Manor valley south of Peebles. The recently adopted title of South East Scotland Discussion Group seems apt.

With the departure from No. 21 a new meeting venue was urgently required. Fortunately one of our members alerted us to the availability of a new room at the National Trust for Scotland's new premises at Newhailes, near Musselburgh. The room, in a converted stable block, is slightly larger than the old library room, and has facilities for making tea and coffee so we can continue our practice of breaking for a cuppa with cakes and biscuits brought along by volunteers from the group. Because the SOC is keen to establish links with other conservation minded groups in Scotland, we have been able to negotiate very good rates for the room, but this does mean that members attending will now have to pay a share of the cost of room hire, where the use of the SOC Library was previously provided free of charge. Those attending will be asked to pay £1 per meeting. Newhailes is open to visitors at all times and is currently under development by NTS. It is well worth a visit if you're in the area, even if you're not coming to a Discussion Group meeting.

Some details of the Newhailes NTS property are provided overleaf, but the venue is a perfect replacement for Regent Terrace. Although away from the city centre, the site is readily accessible by public transport, being on the no. 40 Lothian Bus route (every 30 minutes from Charlotte Square) and close to the more frequent no. 26 service from Corstorphine via Princes Street to Musselburgh. It is also just a short walk from the new railway station at Newcraighall (opening this summer) and Musselburgh station. There is ample car parking space, and a very good real ale pub close by for those who like to continue the discussions over something a little stronger than tea! It is also, quite coincidentally, very close to the new SOC HQ!

Meetings start up again in September and will be held on the following dates in 2002: 4th September, 2nd October, 6th November and 4th December (all Wednesdays) at 7.30pm.

A map of the area showing the location of both Newhailes and Harbour Point is included overleaf.

Mark Holling, Chairman of the SE Scotland Discussion Group

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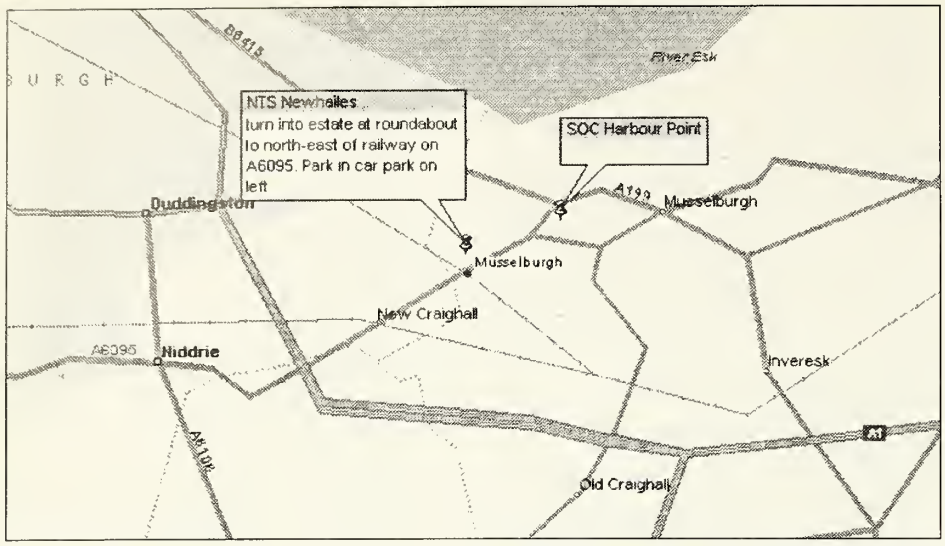


Newhailes, Musselburgh

Newhailes is a fine late 17th century house with impressive 18th century additions and interiors, set in a fascinating 18th century designed landscape. The house was built by the distinguished Scottish architect James Smith in 1686, and bought in the early 1700s by Sir David Dalrymple, of the Scots legal and political dynasty, who were responsible for significant improvements and additions to the house, and for one of the most important rococo interiors in Scotland. The most remarkable addition was the library, which played host to many famous figures of the Scottish Enlightenment and was reportedly described by Dr Johnson as 'the most learned room in Europe'.

Much of the original decoration and furnishing has survived intact, though worn. The Trust is working to conserve the house in such a way as to leave it as 'untouched' by modern hands as possible, retaining the mellowness of its interiors rather than attempting the recreation of an immaculate dwelling as first built.

The important 18th century designed landscape is a source of intriguing discovery, revealing beneath the overgrowth a raised walkway, grotto and woodland walks. Ongoing research, including archaeological work, examination of the diaries of Christian Dalrymple and other historical documents, will help inform the Trust's perspectives for restoration of the landscape. Visitors will be able to witness this gradual process rather than seeing freshly restored gardens. The house opens to the public on 1st June 2002.

The grounds contain one of the largest areas of woodland in the Edinburgh area. There is a mix of native (Oak, Holly, Ash,) and non-native (Beech and Lime, widely planted in Scotland and native to southern England), and complete 'foreigners' such as Sycamore, Larch and Snowberry. The flora is a mix as well, with some native woodland plants such as Wood Anemone, Dog Violet and Wood Sorrel, and 'introductions', probably of garden origin, such as hybrid Bluebell and Star-of Bethlehem. There is a beautiful display of Snowdrops in February!

Woodland management is likely to involve removal of seedlings and saplings of 'invasive' species such as Sycamore and opening up of the canopy by removal of some densely shading trees (eg some Yew) to let more light reach the woodland floor. More dead trees will be left standing where it is safe to do so and more piles of dead wood will be left. This will provide a habitat for invertebrates, fungi and nesting birds. Grassland management should increase in the future to create wildflower meadows, bringing more colour and wildlife into the fields. The fields are the best place to see butterflies on sunny days in spring and summer. Watch out for Orange-tip, Small Copper, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell.

Over 60 species of birds have been recorded so far. In winter there are large groups of Curlew in the fields and flocks of Linnets and other finches around the woodland edge. Summer visitors include Swallows and Swifts. Sparrowhawks patrol the woodlands by day, with Tawny Owls taking over after sunset. Dippers are occasionally seen on the burn and if you are very lucky you could even see a Kingfisher.

Autumn is the best time to see fungi, including Sulphur Tuft, Dryad's Saddle and Stinkhorn. In 1998 a fungi new to science was found at Newhailes after a mycologist (fungi expert) took some rabbit droppings home to incubate. It has been given the name *Ascozonus monascus*, and grows to a staggering 0.2mm in height!

There are undoubtedly many other interesting things to be discovered, but most are very difficult to recognise for most people! Recently a local naturalist found an unusual harvestman (an arachnid, like spiders) called *Leiobunum blackwallii*, while waiting to meet people beside the car park. This was only the third twentieth century record for this species in the Lothians.

SOC members are invited to visit and report their sightings. If you live close by and would like to do more systematic survey work, please contact the SE Scotland Discussion Group via the Chairman.

Scottish Local Bird Recorders' Conference

The Scottish Local Bird Recorders' Conference was held in Perth on 25th November 2001. It was attended by over 40 delegates which included the Recorders from Clyde, Argyll, Ayrshire, Caithness, Borders, Lothian, Fife, Angus & Dundee, NE Scotland, Moray & Nairn and Upper Forth. There were also representatives from the Shetland Local Records Committee, the Rare Birds Breeding Panel, the Scottish Birds Records Committee and Judith Smith, the Greater Manchester Recorder and editor of *NEWSACRE*, the national Local Recorders' Newsletter.

The last such meeting had been in 1996 and so there was much to be talked about. Indeed it soon became apparent that such was the number of issues that required in-depth discussion, that they would hardly be resolved in one day. Accordingly, and in line with the re-organisation of the SOC's committee structure, a Recorders' Committee was formed. Several volunteers came forward: Ray Murray (Borders), Iain Gibson (Clyde), Andy Thorpe (NE Scotland), Angus Hogg (Ayrshire), Kevin Osborn (Shetland Bird Club), Paul Daw (Argyll Bird Club) & Ian Andrews (SBRC). The RecCom will operate mostly by e-mail and phone and hopefully be able to table more reasoned and thought-out presentations for consideration by the recording community.

Local Recorders' Duties

The discussions were fairly wide ranging. A Local Recorders 'job description', devised by Paul Daw and expanded on by Ray Murray, was presented and gained general approval. This will be worked up as a document given to all newly appointed Recorders to allow them to see just precisely what they have been talked into doing! Another issue raised was Recorders' expenses. This was later resolved by SOC Council who circulated a letter explaining what could be recouped from the Club in terms of costs associated with phone calls, postage and printing consumables. Financial matters were also raised when the provision of bird data to commercial companies was dealt with. How much should be charged, who actually owned the data, whether most of the data was worth providing (most being not very systematically gathered) and who should profit from the sale of data were all raised.

A discussion on how Local Recorders were hired and fired followed with Iain Gibson pointing out that the outline of these procedures had already been accepted by an earlier Recorders' Conference in the early 1990s. In effect, it is in the hands of the local SOC

Branch/Local Bird Club Committee to resolve whether a Recorder is performing well or otherwise. The list of Recorders' duties and responsibilities should help when these difficulties arise.

BOU Bird Names

This matter has raised a few difficulties in recent months. In general no-one talks about Northern Pintail or European Robin. However the SOC recently adopted the names, on the recommendation of the Scottish Birds Records Committee, for *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report*. Some Local Recorders were unhappy about this and also the way that in recent years, probably due to the general unpopularity of the BOU names, that major bird publications (e.g. *British Birds, Birding World, Collins Bird Guide*) appear to have come up with their own version of the English names. SOC policy for local reports was that it was entirely up to local report editors which names they used. This left the Local Recorders/Editors in an unenviable position of choosing between several poor options, none of which was satisfactory. What was needed was someone to move forward in getting together all of the organisations with an interest in this and getting them to agree, especially to the really contentious names like Hedge Accentor and Willow Ptarmigan. This matter was deferred to the new Recorders' Committee which may petition the major birding organisations in Britain to get together and come up with a set of names that everyone agrees on.

RBBP & SBRC

Presentations followed by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (Malcolm Ogilvie) and by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (Ron Forrester). Malcolm discussed the way that the RBBP worked and went over some of the initiatives that had been taken in recent years in connection with less rare species (Quail, Barn Owl, Crossbill etc.). These cause a bit of a problem for Local Recorders as the numbers of records we receive do not allow us to provide any real grasp of what actually occurs on the ground in our areas. The main item of interest to follow from Malcolm's talk was the possibility of setting up a list of species that were rare within Scotland (Nuthatch, Nightjar etc.) that were not rare on a UK basis but decidedly rare breeders within Scotland.

Ron's talk discussed a numbers of proposals from SBRC on dealing with 'at sea' records (Andy Thorpe would become the 'at sea' recorder), expanding the Scottish List to include all 20 or so endemic subspecies and providing population estimates in future Scottish Lists.

Databases

Mark Holling and Ray Murray introduced a simple spreadsheet/database for bird recording that would be equally useful for general use by birdwatchers and Local Recorders. The format got general acceptance and several Recorders have since received copies for evaluation. The software can be downloaded to SOC members for free by e-mail and it is hoped that this will encourage birders up and down the country to all 'sing the same song' when it comes to keeping their records on computer, rather than the plethora of different software that we have at present. It would then save Local Recorders a lot of time 'data-crunching' every year.

A numbers of shorter issues followed that included the archiving of both paper and electronic records by Local Recorders. The SOC was willing (indeed is keen) to act as a repository of the many letters received annually by Local Recorders, rather than them ending up in a dustbin. Databases would have to be updated as new versions of software appeared but storage space was not such an issue as with paper records. Ray Murray asked Local Recorders to get their observers to add more details on breeding records whenever possible, especially dates for first song, first feeding of young and first fledging. Only by publishing such information would observers more freely submit this type of data. There was some criticism of the spate of mostly typographical and spelling errors that have crept into the *Scottish Bird Report* in recent issues. It is hoped that these will mostly be resolved by Recorders and local report editors looking over e-mailed drafts of the *SBR* for errors before it is sent to the printers.

Finally there was some discussion on the Scottish Avifaunas project, to produce a set of local avifaunas within Scotland to update those promoted 100 years ago by Harvie-Brown. This proposal has since led to the suggestion of a new *Birds of Scotland* to be written in the next few years, sponsored by the SOC.

Judging from the responses received by e-mail the Conference was generally enjoyed and many thought we had made some advances. The formation of the new committee will hopefully keep the momentum going and we can look forward to another conference next year.

Borders Bird Database

This database was devised by Mark Holling and developed by him with prompts from me. It was circulated amongst the Local Recorders for inspection. It is based on Microsoft Excel, software that is widely available, often being installed onto PCs at purchase. It allows observers to easily enter the basic data, using shortcuts and lookups to help attach Euring and BTO name codes to English names and to provide grid references for site names.

The format is shown below

Species: The first three fields (columns) refer to the species name. The three columns are linked by a system known as a 'lookup'. This means in effect that when the BTO two-letter code is typed in, the Euring number and species names appear automatically.

Numbers: The next two fields refer to the numbers of birds noted, the first with the

BTO Code	Euring	Species	No.	No. Details	Date	Location	Rec. Area	Grid Ref.	Obs. Initials	Obs. Name	Comment
RH	0002	Red-throated Diver	1	N	01/09/00	St.Abbs Head		NT9168	DF	Duncan Fraser	
RH	0002	Red-throated Diver	2	S	02/09/00	St.Abbs Head		NT9168	RDM	Ray Murray	2.5 hrs
R	0002	Red-throated Diver	9		09/09/00	Rotten Brae, Eyemouth		NT9564	JDL	James Lough	
RH	0002	Red-throated Diver	9	7N/2S	23/09/00	Eyemouth		NT9464	RDM	Ray Murray	
RH	0002	Red-throated Diver	20	S	23/09/00	St.Abbs Head		NT9168	StAL	St.Abbs Log	
MS	0152	Mute Swan	5	5 (4j)	04/04/00	Folly Loch		NT6326	RDM	Ray Murray	
MS	0152	Mute Swan	2	Pr ON	06/04/00	Addinston P.		NT5252	RDM	Ray Murray	m=XUA
MS	0152	Mute Swan	2	pr	13/04/00	Dowlaw Dam		NT8569	RDM	Ray Murray	
MA	0186	Mallard	12	2pr&br8	11/05/00	Folly Loch		NT6326	RDM	Ray Murray	
MA	0186	Mallard	18	2br16	11/05/00	Peebles		NT2540	RDM	Ray Murray	
MA	0186	Mallard	5	br4	11/05/00	Whitrig Pond	NT63	NT6234	RDM	Ray Murray	
TP	1009	Tree Pipit	3	mm	28/05/00	Lumsdaine Moor		NT8668	RE	Richard Eagles	
TP	1009	Tree Pipit	1	FY	29/05/00	Friar's Croft near Yair	NT43	NT4431	MH	Mark Holling	In clearfell

actual number, the second the unit used (pair, territory etc.). Isolating the number from the unit means that the numbers can be presented or analysed graphically.

Location: The next three fields deal with where the record occurred. The first allows observers to sort their records between recording areas. The Grid Reference column mostly uses 4-figure references, 6-figures mostly being used for nest-sites and other records that require specific locations to be given. The grid reference column should be valuable when mapping records, entries from this column being the main input to mapping packages such as D-Map.

Observer: The next two columns also employ a look-up, linking the initials to the full name. This allows simple entry of the observer's initials, saving time.

Comments: A useful field for entry of additional data such as ring numbers, habitat and timings.

All of these fields can be sorted. This allows the records to be sorted by species (in taxonomic order), date, location, observers etc.

At the bottom of the screen is a set of tabs that hold additional data. The Records Worksheet is shown. The next two tabs contain a short list of the commonest species, allowing easy reference in the event of forgotten BTO codes. The next one has the full species list for the Borders. These can be modified for other areas or indeed for personal site and life lists etc. A full British List is contained on Worksheet 9, locked to prevent accidental amendment. The Observers Worksheet contains a list of all the observers who have submitted records in the Borders in recent years, each with a unique set of initials. The Grid Refs Worksheet holds nearly 2000 references for bird sites in the Borders. This again allows easy reference when you require a grid reference for a site. All of these can be added to and modified to suit individuals, whether Local Recorders or observers.

The version described here was built for the Borders but can be easily adapted by Local Recorders for their own area, adding local sites (if required) and the bird list for the recording area. It is hoped that this database will be widely adopted across Scotland. It is easy to use and can be used as a diary for your records. If it gains wide acceptance it could be of great assistance to Local Recorders, saving them much time. Observers will simply send off their annual records as an Excel file on a floppy disc or as an e-mail attachment. These will then be merged with the master dataset for that year by the Recorder. The format means that 'data-crunching' will be reduced and may even speed up the production of bird reports. The Local Biological Records Centres should also benefit as the database is compatible with Recorder 2000, the National Biodiversity Network's software that is widely used at Local Biological Records Centres.

If any member wishes a copy of the software, it can be obtained by e-mailing me at ray.d.murray@ukgateway.net or by sending a floppy disc to 4 Bellfield Crescent, Eddleston, Peebles, EH45 8RQ.

Ray Murray

Lothian & Borders Surveys

Via the SE Scotland Discussion Group, two surveys of breeding birds have been organised by the Lothian and Borders branches of the SOC: Ringed Plover and Yellow Wagtail. Coverage of all sites known in the *Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland* has already been arranged, but to ensure completeness, it is important that members submit ***all*** records of these two species recorded in breeding habitat this summer. Records should be sent to the Local Recorders as usual: David Kelly for Lothian and Ray Murray for Borders, preferably as soon after the end of the breeding season as possible.

Mute Swan Census 2002

Please note that this article, submitted in February, refers to fieldwork which will largely be complete by the time you read this. However, the original article is being included in full both to keep members informed and to enable members to provide appropriate information to the survey organisers so that as full a record of Mute Swans in Scotland in 2002 can be collated. (Ed.)

The Mute Swan Census 2001, described in *SBN* 61 (March 2001), was a victim of the foot and mouth disease outbreak and had to be postponed. The census will now take place in spring 2002. This census will repeat those undertaken in 1983 and 1990, with the specific aims of determining the size of the Mute Swan population, quantifying the number of territorial and breeding pairs in addition to the number of non-territorial birds.

The census is being organised by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in association with the BTO, Swan Study Group and the SOC on whose behalf we are co-ordinating the Scottish part of the survey. Survey methods are very straightforward involving simply counting all swans and noting whether or not the birds are breeding (e.g. with a nest or a brood of cygnets), primarily within the April/May period, with an emphasis on counting non-breeding flocks in mid-April to avoid problems of double-counting of these through movements between flock sites.

The survey unit is the 10km square of the national grid and observers will be asked to visit all suitable habitat for Mute Swans within their allocated square or part of a square. Whilst we hope that full coverage can be obtained for Scotland, some pre-selection of 10km squares has taken place after discussion with the various local organisers and these squares must be covered as a minimum requirement of the survey. They relate primarily to areas where on-going studies of the Mute Swan can guarantee full coverage, squares which held 50 or more swans in the 1990 census plus any new squares falling into that category since then, all squares occupied in the 1990 census and a random selection of other squares in the more remote areas. It is hoped that this method will result in counting the vast majority of Mute Swans in Scotland.

Given that the population in our own study area of Lothians and Fife has doubled between 1990 and 2000, we anticipate that many other parts of Scotland will show substantial increases since 1990. Consequently, it is likely that the species has occupied many additional territories and developed new flock sites in recent years, some of these sites themselves being new farm ponds and reservoirs not shown on Ordnance Survey maps. All selected 10km squares, therefore, will require to be checked thoroughly. In Scotland the additional problems of remoteness of sites and lack of observers could hinder the aim of full coverage and local organisers, therefore, will greatly appreciate offers of help with the census to ensure its success.

A list of local organisers in Scotland and the areas for which they are responsible is shown below; they will be able to allocate an area to cover and provide survey forms and instructions. Please volunteer your

Scottish Mute Swan Census 2002 - List of Local Organisers

Aberdeenshire (with Kincardine and Deeside)
Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS. Tel: 01224 823 184
Alistair@cairncry.freeserve.co.uk

Angus
Ian Hutchison, 13 Eddie Avenue, Brechin, Angus DD9 6YD. Tel: 01356 624 851
ian_ntbg@lineone.net

Argyll & Islands
Malcolm Ogilvie, Glencairn, Bruichladdich, Isle of Islay PA49 7UN. Tel: 01496 850 218
maogilvie@indaal.demon.co.uk

Arran
Audrey Watters, 'Sula', Margnaheglish Road, Lamlash, Isle of Arran KA27 8LE.

Ayrshire
Jim Thomson, Sundrum Smithy, By Ayr, Ayrshire KA6 6LR. Tel: 01292 570 351
Sundrum@e-mail.msn.com

Badenoch and Strathspey
Keith Duncan, SNH, Achantoul, Aviemore, Inverness-shire PH22 1QD.
KEITH.DUNCAN@snh.gov.uk

Borders
Andrew Bramhall, 'Cygnus', 2 Abbotsferry Road, Tweedbank, Galashiels, Borders TD1 3RX. Tel: 01896 755 326
andrew.t.bramhall@btopenworld.com

Bute
Ian Hopkins, 2 Eden Place, Rothesay, Bute, Strathclyde PA20 9BS. Tel: 01700 504042
ian@hopkins0079.freeserve.co.uk

Caithness
Stan Laybourne, Old Schoolhouse, Harpsdale, Halkirk, Caithness KW12 6UN. Tel: 01847 841 244. stanlaybourne@talk21.com

Central (including Stirling)
Neil Bielby, 56 Ochiltree, Dunblane, Perthshire FK15 0DF. Tel: 01786 823 830
neil.bielby@ntlworld.com

Clyde (including Glasgow, Renfrew and Lanark)
Jim & Val Wilson, 76 Laigh Road, Newton Mearns, Glasgow G77 5EQ.
Tel: 0141 639 2516.
jim.val@btinternet.com

Dumfries & Galloway
Alexa Seagrave, WWT Eastpark, Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway DG1 4RS. Tel: 01387 770 200. caerlaaverock@wwt.org.uk

Fife & Kinross (with Isle of May)
Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG. Tel: 01334 656 804
swans@allanwbrown.co.uk

Harris & Lewis
Chris Reynolds, Reef, Uig, Isle of Lewis.
Tel: 01851 672 376

Inverness-shire
Hugh Insley, 1 Drummond Place, Inverness IV2 4JT. Tel: 01463 230 652
hugh.insley@tinyworld.co.uk

Isle of Cumbrae
Rupert Ormond, Bellevue, Marine Parade, Millport, Isle of Cumbrae KA28 0ED.
rupert.ormond@millport.gla.ac.uk

Lochaber
John Dye, Toad Hall, Dalnabreach, Acharacle, Argyll PH36 4JX. john.dye@virgin.net

Lothians
Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG. Tel: 01334 656 804
swans@allanwbrown.co.uk

Moray & Nairn
Bob Proctor, 91 South Street, Elgin, Grampian IV30 1JW. Tel: 01343 548 395
bob.proctor@rspb.org.uk

Orkney
Colin Corse, Garrisdale, Lynn Park, Kirkwall, Orkney. Tel: 01856 874484
colincorse@hotmail.com

Perthshire
Ron Youngman, Blairchroisk Cottage, Ballinluig Pitlochry, Perthshire PH9 0NF. Tel: 01796 482424. Blairchroisk@aol.com

Ross-shire and Sutherland
David Butterfield, 1 Calrichie Cottages, Kindeace, Invergordon, Ross-shire IV18 0LN. Tel: 01349 854 434. dave.birder@freeuk.com

Rum, Eigg, Canna & Muck
Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR. Tel: 01862 894 329
bob.swann@freeuk.com

Shetland
Paul Harvey, Shetland Biological Records Centre, 22-24 North Road, Lerwick Shetland ZE1 0NQ. Tel: 01595 694 688
sbrc@zetnet.co.uk

Uists & Benbecula
Andrew Stevenson, Mill House, Snishival, South Uist, Western Isles HS8 5SG. Tel: 01870 620238. andrew.stevenson@snh.gov.uk

services to help with the survey in your area - even if this is just checking your local site rather than a full 10km square as such data will be invaluable to achieving a comprehensive survey. If you are unclear which local organiser to contact please let us know and we will direct you to the relevant person. If you cannot commit to a specific area please keep a note of any territorial or breeding pairs and April flocks you come across anywhere in Scotland in 2002 and send them to us for forwarding to the responsible local organiser. All such observations will be gratefully received.

The support and enthusiasm we have received from local organisers suggest that this will be the most successful Mute Swan census in Scotland to date but this can only be achieved with the support of birdwatchers in Scotland. The species has a very high profile with the public and it is up to birdwatchers to provide the data on which its present status can be determined. As there are a number of colour-ringing schemes taking place in Scotland this can add to the interest of the survey and the value of these studies so please record any rings (colour and numbers/letters) you may see.

Let us hope for a successful survey and we wait in anticipation the forthcoming results which will be published in *Scottish Birds*.

Allan & Lyndesay Brown,
61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife,
KY15 4UG. Tel: 01334 656804.
e-mail: swans@allanwbrown.co.uk

Scottish Biodiversity Week 31 Aug – 8 Sept 2002

Take this opportunity to get involved and discover the delights and importance of biodiversity in your area. Local Biodiversity Action Plan Officers, in partnership with local groups, are running a series of activities (e.g. walks, talks, competitions, practical work opportunities) to help raise awareness of 'the variety of life'. **Venue:** Scotland-wide! **Contact:** National LBAP Officer, Scottish Biodiversity Group, c/o RSPB, Dunedin House, 25 Ravelstone Terrace, Edinburgh, EH4 3TP. Tel: 0131 311 6500; fax 0131 311 6569; email joanna.lenthall@rspb.org.uk; website www.scotland.gov.uk/ biodiversity

Siskins by Dan Powell

Atlas News

At present, only two areas of Scotland have published breeding bird atlases. The first, *Birds of North-East Scotland*, appeared in 1990 and used blocks of uniform habitat as the recording unit. This book is now out of print. The second, covering Lothian and Borders and published by the SOC on behalf of those two branches, used the tetrad as the recording unit. See below for news on a special low-price offer on this book. Atlas projects have been started in three other areas, however, and news on the progress of these is given here. In addition, two new atlas projects are starting up this year and the organisers are looking for your support. More details below - but it is hoped that news on Scottish Atlas projects will become a regular feature in *Scottish Bird News*.

South-east Scotland Atlas now cheaper

Scotland's first tetrad breeding bird atlas, *The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland* by Ray Murray, Mark Holling, Harry Dott and Peter Vandome, was published by the SOC in 1998. This hardback book details all 168 species found breeding in Lothian and Borders between 1988 and 1994. Most of these species receive a full page of text detailing their distribution and how that relates to local factors, plus a map showing their breeding distribution in the two regions. There are also 8 pages of colour photographs showing the local landscape from the air. The book was reviewed in *SBN* 53 (March 1999).

This well-received book is now available at the much reduced price of just £15 (was £27). (Please note that postage and packing is extra (£5) if that is required). All orders should be sent to Jim Mattocks at 9 East Fettes Avenue, Edinburgh EH4 1DN. Please make cheques payable to '*SE Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas*'. All profits from the book will go to the SOC to support local initiatives in Lothian and Borders.

Ayrshire, Clyde & Fife Atlases in production.

Fieldwork for the Ayrshire Atlas (covering 1991-1997) is complete and mapping and analysis of the results is underway. Progress is reported to be slow, owing to the other commitments of the key people involved, and it is unlikely that a book will be published for perhaps another five years. This delay, however, will be put to good use to update the Ayrshire list so that the final publication is likely to be a new *Birds of Ayrshire*, including breeding distribution maps.

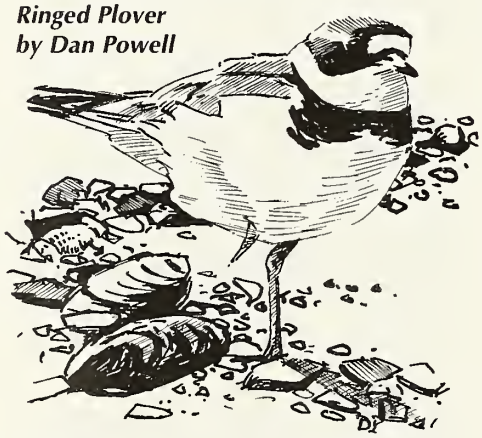
The Clyde Atlas started up as long ago as 1987, but changes in personnel and difficulties computerising the data have delayed final analysis and publication. It is hoped that a more detailed update will be provided in a future *SBN*.

The Fife Bird Atlas will be the final outcome of fieldwork conducted between 1991 and 1999. It will show detailed maps of breeding distribution of each species on a 2km x 2km (tetrad) grid and complementary monthly maps of non-breeding distribution on a 5km x 5km grid as appropriate. The Atlas will include the results of national and local censuses, surveys and ringing throughout the year. The data has been digitised and managed by the local Biological Records Centre Fife Nature. Breeding maps are complete and distribution maps are nearing completion. All 213 species accounts have been written and are being edited, while funding for publication is actively being sought. Although the workload of the coordinators has delayed completion, it is hoped that the Atlas will be published in 2003.

New atlases starting in 2002

A replacement for the *Birds of North-East Scotland*, this time using the tetrad as the recording unit, has been started in the North East Scotland area. This is expected to be a five year study and unlike the earlier book will include Moray - the first time this area will have been surveyed in this manner. This Atlas is being run by a group of local birders from the SOC Grampian branch and the Moray Bird Club. Contact John Wills, Secrertary of the Grampian branch, for more details at Bilbo, Monymusk, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire AB51 7HA.

Ringed Plover
by Dan Powell



Fieldwork for the Clackmannanshire Breeding Bird Atlas is also underway this year, organised by members of the Central Scotland Branch. This atlas marks new ground in that it will be the first Scottish atlas to use the one kilometre square as its recording unit - there are only 200 such squares in the county, so it is quite feasible to survey this compact and varied area on a finer scale. Volunteers for intensive work on one or more squares, or those willing to record any casual records, are required.

Please contact one of the organisers for more information: Neil Bielby, 56 Ochiltree, Dunblane, FK15 0DF; tel 01786 823830; e-mail neil.bielby@ntlworld.com or Andre Thiel, 6 Tait Place, Tillicoultry, FK13 6RU; tel 01259 753863.

The Best of Days, the Worst of Days

When I read the invitation in *Scottish Bird News* (March 2001) to submit a piece on the theme of 'The Best of Days, the Worst of Days', the first thing that crossed my mind was that after eight years on Islay, I was spoilt for choice. Squally autumn mornings spent scanning through thousands of seabirds blown inshore by strong westerlies... the excitement of finding a Semipalmated Sandpiper at Loch Gruinart in autumn 1999, and Argyll's first White-rumped Sandpiper in the same place a year later ... calm spring evenings spent counting divers on Loch Indaal... I could go on and on.

But then I thought about the other side of the coin. What if I had to write about my worst day's birding in 1,800 words? Given my location, I couldn't follow the tried-and-tested formula and describe a spectacular twitching disaster involving car breakdowns, seasickness, wrong directions, and a mega-rarity that either flew off or was taken by a Sparrowhawk seconds before I arrived. The two-hour ferry journey to the mainland stunted the growth of my British list a long time ago, and I didn't feel that my attempts to catch up with local rarities such as Waxwing or Hobby would interest anybody.

Nor did I fancy taking the easy way out by writing about a bad day outside Scotland, even though my recent experience of Hong Kong's Long Valley sprang immediately to mind. So where did that leave me? I remembered mornings when I had returned home looking like a drowned rat after an hour struggling to see anything at all in howling gales and torrential rain. And days – too many of them – when the wind had inexplicably veered from west to east during the few minutes it took me to cover the distance between my home and my seawatching site. None of these, however, would merit more than a couple of hundred words.

There is, though, another kind of bad day – the day that starts off full of promise but produces absolutely nothing even though all the conditions seem right. A spring or autumn day when, against all odds, migration seems to have ground to a halt, and the migrants that are presumably resting have chosen anywhere but Islay to do so. The interesting thing is that I remembered one such occasion very clearly, although I had to look through my notebooks to pinpoint the exact date – September 20 1996. I have no idea why I remember it so well, but I do.

Mid-September 1996 was sandwiched between an unusually warm, calm start to

the month – the highlight for me being the discovery of three Buff-breasted Sandpipers together at Ardnave – and an excellent series of seawatches at the month's end. From about 14th, a run of easterlies and southeasterlies set in, producing immediate results in the form of Argyll's first Woodchat Shrike, found by Ciaràn Cronin near Port Ellen on 16th. This is still the only shrike on my Islay list. In fact, it is the only shrike of any species to be recorded on Islay since I moved to the island in 1993, so it was an impressive find.

Easterly winds continued for the rest of that week. On the morning of September 19, my usual walking route yielded two Whitethroats, a Whinchat and a Sedge Warbler, in addition to hordes of Redpolls, Siskins and Linnets. I hasten to point out that although Islay does very well for wildfowl and other aquatic species, passerine migration is often conspicuous by its absence – as the shrike situation would suggest. Granted, there are reasonable movements of Skylarks, finches and winter thrushes, but on the other hand it is entirely possible to go a whole autumn without seeing a Chiffchaff. As a general rule, I reckon that if I see any summer visitors (other than *hirundines* and Wheatears) after mid-September, I am doing quite well. So I was mildly encouraged by my morning walk, though unfortunately I had to spend the rest of the day working. The 20th, however, was a Saturday; even better, my wife and daughter were off to Arran on the ferry. For once, I would have an entire weekend to myself.

The next day, I was up before dawn, full of anticipation. The breeze was still in the east, but there was a lot more cloud about than there had been of late – a good sign, perhaps? Since there was no earthly reason to go seawatching with the wind in this direction, I opted for a repeat of the previous morning. It turned out to be a bad move. I saw no Siskins and only one small flock of Redpolls; even Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails seemed thin on the ground. Apart from bemoaning the absence of birds, the only thing I wrote in my notebook was: 'One Goldcrest'. The situation was clearly desperate, so I quickened my step and went to collect the car.

Because nobody (as far as I was aware) had checked up on the Woodchat Shrike since the evening of its discovery, it seemed logical to head for the Port Ellen area. Unsurprisingly, in view of the recent clear nights, there was no sign of the shrike. Disappointingly, there was very little else around either, despite a thorough investigation of the varied habitats in the area. Heedless of grammatical niceties, I scribbled in my notebook: 'Kilnaughton Bay – no shrike, no nothing.' Still, it was only 10 a.m. and there were plenty of other places to visit, even though the wind seemed to be strengthening. In fact, I had a sneaking suspicion that it was turning into one of those bright and breezy days that so often fail to deliver.

I headed off towards the Mull of Oa, noting in passing a Golden Eagle over Coillabus. Parking at Upper Killeyan, I took the path towards the American Monument. This crosses an overgrown ditch that normally provides shelter for plenty of birds. Although my previous visits had been few and far between, the ditch had produced my one and only sighting of Tree Sparrow on Islay, in August 1993. On this occasion, however, I had to content myself with a couple of Stonechats, a handful of Robins, and a Wren or two. My vague hopes of a skulking warbler or rare bunting came to nothing, and there was no sign either of the Twites, Linnets and Skylarks that normally frequent the area in autumn. This, like the absence of the usual Choughs, may have had something to do with the breeze, which was becoming a real nuisance.

Needing to find some shelter, I headed for the west-facing coast at Kintra. However, it wasn't as calm as I had hoped. The combination of a rough sea and an annoying heat-haze soon put paid to my efforts to scan for divers and seaduck. Apart from a scattering of Red-breasted Mergansers, and some Eiders loafing near the shore, there wasn't much to see. Undaunted, I walked south, heading for a scrubby area that I thought would be reasonably sheltered. I was right for once, but it did me no good. There was nothing about – not even a Willow Warbler. The fields likewise were empty of Wheatears and the shore devoid of waders.

Some time after lunch, I finally gave up. Nothing I had seen encouraged me to continue. I had no companion to share my disappointment or suggest a radical rethink of the day's strategy. And, Islay being Islay, I couldn't phone anyone else to see how they had got on, in the hope that I could stage a mini-twitch to some other part of the island. I had to face the facts. One, it was highly unlikely that anyone else but me had spent the morning birding locally. Two, I hadn't seen anything. Three, I was one day closer to the end of the migration season, and 20 September 1996 would never come round again.

I think I went shopping, or maybe swimming, or maybe even to the pub. I don't know for sure because I don't keep notes on that kind of thing. There would have been plenty of space, though. Eight hours of solid birding that day warranted only 15 lines in an A6 notebook, mostly listing where I went and when. (To put this statistic into context, I should perhaps point out that my accumulated field notebooks occupy more than a metre of shelf space in my bookcase). Eight hours of my life compressed into a scribbled half-page: I couldn't help thinking of all the useful things I could have done instead.

Now I don't expect that there was anything particularly unusual about the day I have just described. Several more are surely hiding among the pages of my notebooks, although because of the brevity of the entries, they don't draw attention to themselves. I imagine, too, that other birders must have similar experiences from time to time. It's difficult to judge, though, because written accounts are understandably few and far between. I suppose that a few people may possess such well-developed bird-finding skills that they never go home disappointed. Others may be just plain lucky. Yet others are content to liven up a dull day by spending it studying the feeding behaviour of Common Gulls or Starlings in the nearest field. In some ways I envy them – I can spend an hour or so looking at Herring Gull plumages if there's nothing else around, but my patience is not inexhaustible. For me and (I guess) for many whose interest in birds centres on migration, the main significance of bad days is that there must, by definition, be good days too. Take away the former and the latter lose their edge – it's the Yin and Yang of birding.

In this particular case, the balance was restored remarkably quickly. The very next morning, under almost identical weather conditions, I did my usual walk yet again and found a Lesser Whitethroat. Those unfamiliar with Islay may have difficulty in believing that it was only the fourth record for the island. I even had to submit a description. Later in the day I added a fly-by Spotted Redshank to my house list. This too was at the time a local rarity, being only the third Islay record since 1980.

The moral of the story is clear. If you have a bad day, don't let it discourage you from going out again as soon as you can. Instead, you should seize the opportunity because when your expectations are low, you are almost sure to be pleasantly surprised. And don't forget that every minute you spend in the field adds to your chances of finding that major rarity.

Tristan ap Rheinallt

Leave a legacy that lives on ...

... and help new generations to enjoy and study Scottish birds in their native habitats

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was formed in 1936 to help people of all ages and backgrounds appreciate Scottish birds. We would like help from members to establish a new club HQ and resource centre for birdwatching in Scotland :

- *The work of the SOC in its early days was helped by legacies. A gift can help us today & in the future.*
- *Your legacy, or gift, can make a real difference to establishing our new resource centre & SOC HQ.*
- *Perhaps you have a slide collection, or books, which could be used to expand the SOC's collections.*

We are seeking donations and legacies that will help us create a new National Centre for Birdwatching in Scotland and expand our educational activities.

For further information contact : ***Bill Gardner*** *M.B.E.*
The SOC, ***Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh EH21 6JS***
Telephone : ***0131 653 0653 or Fax us on 0131 653 0654***

SC No : 009859

E-mail : ***mail@the-soc.org.uk*** *See what we do on* ***www.the-soc.org.uk***

Hallyards Tree Sparrow Project Report 2001

2001 was the third year of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow nest box project at Hallyards, a site chosen by Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, between Kirkliston and Edinburgh Airport (see *SBN* 60, December 2000).

Since the boxes had been so successful in 2000 it was decided to increase the number from fourteen to twenty-five for the 2001 season. All the new boxes were put up in one, extremely large, garden.

Table One gives a breakdown of the 2001 breeding season, with 2000 included for comparison. Fewer pairs used the boxes during first broods in 2001 compared to 2000 but this was offset by the increase in the numbers of pairs going on to produce third clutches.

Other Sites

1. Wheatlands House

Fifteen boxes were erected on trees around the perimeter of the garden of Wheatlands House, approximately 2 km east of Hallyards. Three of these went on to be occupied by Tree Sparrows and a total of 18 chicks fledged successfully from 6 clutches.

Gaps in the walls of semi-derelict stone-built steadings and workshops outside the grounds at Wheatlands no doubt already offer a number of suitable nest sites. However, it will be interesting to see if the Tree Sparrows will move to the boxes more readily in the future, as the entrance holes are too small for competing House Sparrows.

2. Craigbrae

Rather belatedly, due to Foot and Mouth restrictions, 5 boxes were erected on scattered trees around gorse and thorn-covered crags at Craigbrae Farm, approximately 1 km north of Wheatlands.

The boxes went up just a bit too late for first clutches and, indeed, were left unoccupied throughout the breeding season. 2002 will reveal if they will be colonised.

Winter Feeding

Summers-Smith (2000) considers that the most important conservation strategy for the Tree Sparrow is the provision of a winter food supply. To this end, Pete Gordon of the RSPB kindly arranged a supply of barley tailings. From early December 2000, 25 kg a week were scattered in the shade of a hawthorn hedge along the verge of a disused lane at Hallyards. By January 2001 up to 80 Tree Sparrows were regularly feeding on the grain along with similar numbers of Yellowhammers. Scrutiny of the feeding flock with a telescope allowed identification of at least five colour-ringed chicks from the 2001 breeding season. Two of these birds also happened to be siblings. It is planned to continue winter feeding over this coming winter.

Colour-Ringing

As in 2000, all the chicks were fitted under licence with a metal BTO ring and up to two plastic colour rings in combinations that allow individual identification of each bird. Colours used were red, orange, yellow, white, light blue, dark green and mauve. Sightings of any of these birds can be made to me at the address below.

Volunteers

Anyone wishing to spend time during the winter months scrutinizing the feeding flock at Hallyards for colour-ringed birds would be more than welcome, particularly midweek. Please contact me in advance so that I can let the residents of Hallyards know.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to all the residents of Hallyards, particularly the Bairds, Murphies and Woods for allowing access to their gardens. The McGowans kindly granted access to the grounds of Wheatlands House. Brian Minshull coordinated access permission at Craigbrae and put up the boxes.

Walkers Timber of Bo'ness generously donated wood to build more boxes while Pete Gordon (RSPB) donated winter food.

Sue Steel and Stephen Corcoran, Biodiversity Officers at City of Edinburgh Council, donated pre-built boxes and I was grateful for their continuing support for the project.

Rob Campbell helped me build and erect boxes for Hallyards and Wheatlands and, along with Andy Coates and Shona Quin, helped with the summer fieldwork.

References

Summers-Smith, J.D. 2000. *Tree Sparrows: A Strategy for Conservation.* Private circulation 10.02.00.

Alan Hilton, 4 Arrol Place, South Queensferry, Lothian, EH30 9QB. Tel: 0131 319 1631.

It is with regret that we have to report the sudden death of Alan Hilton who suffered a haemorrhage in December 2001.

Table One	1st clutch	2nd clutch	3rd clutch	Total				
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
1st egg date	4/5-11/5	4/5- 8/5	12/6-26/6	5/6-22/6	17/7-21/7	8/7-27/7		
No. of clutches	10	8	11*	10	5	7	26*	25
Mean clutch size	5	4.5	4.5	5	4.8	5	4.7	4.8
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Range	4-6	3-5	2-7	5	4-5	4-6	2-7	3-6
Total eggs	50	36	49	50	24	35	123	121
Predated eggs	0	0	3	5	0	5	3	10
Total hatched	38	31	42	33	15	22	95	86
% hatched	76.0	86.1	85.7	66.0	62.5	62.9	77.2	71.1
Total fledged	38	28	39	27	2	16	79	71
% fledged (eggs)	76.0	77.8	79.6	54.0	8.3	45.7	64.2	58.7
% fledged (hatched)	100.0	90.3	92.9	81.8	13.3	72.7	83.2	82.6
Mean hatched	3.8	3.5	3.5	2.7	0.4	2.3	3.0	2.8
Total infertile eggs	12	5	4	10	7	8	23	23
% infertile eggs	24.0	13.9	8.2	20.0	29.2	22.9	18.7	19.0
Clutches with infertile eggs	6	3	2	5	5	5	13	13
Fertile eggs failing to hatch	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	2
Total deaths before fledging	0	3	3	6	13	6	16	15
% deaths before fledging	0.0	9.7	7.1	18.2	86.7	27.3	16.8	17.4
Projected fledging date	4/6-10/6	2/6- 7/6	12/7-24/7	5/7-22/7	16/8-20/8	8/8-26/8		

***Includes a predated clutch excluded from the 2000 Report.**

Dates of first song arrival and bird numbers, in mid Deeside and the Forest of Birse, in 2001.

Table 1. Data for 2001 - (a) dates (number of days after 31st December) of arrival/ first song in Mid Deeside; (b) numbers of birds counted in the Birse study area; (c) weather observations in Glen Dye.

(a) Differences from median date (in Jenkins & Watson 2000) of first song/arrival recorded in 2001.			(b) Nos. of singing passerines, lekking Blackcocks, and gulls' nests (to the nearest 5) in the Forest of Birse study area.		
(i) Species in Jenkins & Watson (1999)			Mean 1987-99	2000	2001
Mallard			5	3	0
Goosander			5	0	0
Black Grouse			23	16	12
Oystercatcher	-	5	11	10	15
Lapwing	-	40	14	19	18
Curlew	+	8	14	12	9
Common Sandpiper	-	3	1	2	3
Black-headed Gull	+	10	0	80	30
Woodpigeon			n.c.	13	11
Cuckoo	-	3	5	1	1
Sand Martin			0	1	1
Swallow	+	5	n.c.	8	5
Tree Pipit	-	2	2	0	0
Meadow Pipit			18	27	28
Grey Wagtail	-	6	8	13	13
Pied Wagtail	-	45	8	16	13
Dipper			6	5	4
Wren	+	9	67	99	25
Dunnock	-	11	14	28	19
Robin	-	12	43	71	60
Redstart	+	2	6	4	5
Whinchat	-	2	12	18	13
Stonechat			5	5	1
Blackbird	+	3	4	4	6
Song Thrush		0	16	20	22
Mistle Thrush	+	15	10	8	6
Willow Warbler	+	2	66	87	97
Spotted Flycatcher	+	7	8	10	13
Long-tailed Tit			3	1	1
Blue Tit	-	2	13	15	19
Great Tit	-	9	13	13	10
Treecreeper			9	15	17
Starling			n.c.	6	9
House Sparrow			0	1	2
Chaffinch	-	11	93	92	93
Linnet			0	12	5
Yellowhammer			5	0	0
(ii) Other species in Jenkins & Watson (2000)					
Snipe	+	4			
Sedge Warbler	-	2			
Whitethroat	-	19			
Blackcap	-	4			
Wood Warbler	-	7			
Green Woodpecker	+	54			
Greenfinch	-	18			

n.c. not counted

(c) Observations in Glen Dye, near Birse, in winter 2000/2001 compared with the previous 14 years showed that (i) snow lay on nearly twice as many mornings as in the next most severe winter; (ii) the cumulative depth of fresh snow fallen since the previous morning was nearly twice that of the next snowiest winter; (iii) the cumulative number of °C below 0°C, measured every morning, was c.30% more than that of the previous coldest years, and (iv) the longest run of consecutive days with snow lying was c.60% more than in the previous snowiest winter.

In mid Deeside the late winter weather in early 2001 was much the most severe since 1987/88 (Table 1). The maximum level snow depth at Wester Floors and Ballochan on Forest of Birse estate near the top of the glen reached about 1m. Particularly cold spells occurred on 4th - 10th February, 23rd February - 6th March and 18th - 21st March. Spring as estimated from the date of birch bud burst was more than two weeks later than usual.

Dates of first song arrival

These were recorded as in previous years (Jenkins, D. and Watson, A. 2000. *Bird Study* 47: 249-251) and compared with median dates from previous years (Table 1). Dates were more than two weeks late in only two species, Mistle Thrush and Green Woodpecker. Of 30 species for which data are available, 14 first song/arrival dates within five days of the median, six being earlier (Pied Wagtail 45 days earlier), and only two later. In six species, the dates varied by 6-10 days from the median, Grey Wagtail and Great Tit being earlier and Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Wren and Spotted Flycatcher later. Some birds may have been most affected by weather before the severe February conditions.

Bird numbers

Table 1 also compares bird numbers in 2001 with those for 2000 and with the means of highest counts in previous years (Jenkins, D. and Watson, A 1999. *Scottish Birds* 20: 81-93). Big decreases were shown by Wren (down about 75% from 2000) and Dunnock (down about 60%). Smaller decreases were found in Curlews, Sand Martins, Robins, Great Tits (though>50% down since 1999), Stonechats, Long-tailed Tits, Linnets and Goldcrests. Most other species showed little change in numbers though some increased from either 2000 or the previous means, notably Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Meadow Pipit, Willow Warbler, Blue Tit and Treecreeper.

Shoots of Goosanders were organised weekly on Glen Tanar and neighbouring estates in early 2001 and this may be the cause of the near extinction of this species in the upper Feugh in 2000 and 2001 when I saw occasional single ducks but no drakes. If one takes Blackcock figures at face value, there has been a big decrease since a count of 37 in 1987 and four years of 26-28 between 1988 and 1995, to the 12 in 2001. However, I believe this lek may have fragmented but I could not check other likely leks nearby because of access restrictions due to Foot and Mouth Disease. Curlews have tended to decrease since the mid 1990s and the 2001 figure is the lowest. Lapwing numbers are increasing, with 2001 producing the third highest count in the 15-year series and with numbers at Ballochan farm the highest in

any year. Some returned to Ballochan on or before 10th January and stayed during the snow (Leslie George, pers. comm.). This over-wintering is unprecedented in recent years. On Ballochan, they nest around field margins, on rough grass near the moor edge. Such places are important for Lapwing nest survival in Deeside. The July Lapwing flock at Ballochan numbered about 70. Oystercatchers too seem to be increasing despite poor breeding in 2000. Numbers in 2001 were the highest recorded and three times that in 1997. They probably bred poorly again because groups were seen throughout the nesting season. The flock in July numbered not more than 40 from a breeding population of 15 pairs. The Black-headed Gull colony that had formed in 1999 moved to a nearby wetter site, with a big reduction in 2001.

The main species affected by the cold winter are thought to have been Wren and Dunnock and perhaps Mistle Thrush. Wren numbers were similar to those of 1987 after another cold winter. Dunnock numbers in 2001, though much lower than in 2000, were by no means without precedent, with fewer counted in nine previous years. Stonechats decreased as might be expected, also Long-tailed Tits, always scarce. Mistle Thrush numbers have declined since 1998 but were low previously, following higher numbers in 1989 and 1991. Jenkins & Watson (1999) found that the number of mornings with snow lying accounted best for variation in Robin numbers, but for this species the count in 2001 was higher than the previous mean. The decrease in Linnet numbers in 2001 was associated with the removal of Gorse at Ballochan to help reduce Rabbit numbers.

Presumably Wren numbers will recover quickly and it is interesting that this severe winter seems to have had so little effect on the birds in Birse. This does raise the question of where these birds spend the winter. The cold weather of February 2001 affected a big area of Deeside, with little food for such species as Chaffinch. Are they capable of withstanding low temperatures and deep snow for prolonged periods or do they move far away?

I am grateful to the landowners for permitting my study and to Forest of Birse estate and to Birse Community Trust for grants to help with the cost of my petrol. The weather data were kindly provided by Frank Sheridan. Adam Watson analysed them and commented on the manuscript.

David Jenkins, CEH, Banchory

University of Glasgow Trinidad Expedition 2000

Members of the University of Glasgow Trinidad Expedition conducted a survey at two sites in the Northern Range mountains of Trinidad during July and August 2000. The first was located on the ridge of the Northern Range to the west of the summit of Morne Bleu at around 710 m in an area of lower montane rainforest. The second site at Simla Research Station in the Arima Valley, in the foothills of the Northern Range at 250 m, was located in an area of seasonal deciduous forest. Previous cultivation in this area has resulted in a secondary growth of developing canopy trees shading out much of the cacao and citrus trees.

The reasons for the study were twofold. First, the study was a continuation of a long-term mark-recapture project (Johnston *et al.*, 1997). Large numbers of birds have been ringed in the two areas since 1986 and recapture rates of birds from the early years of the study are still high. Second, the area around Simla has been subject to increasing levels of disturbance since 1995 with the re-opening of quarries on surrounding land. The work in 2000 and a subsequent study in 2001 aimed to look at the effects of disturbance on the bird population around Simla by comparing the numbers and species of birds caught in 1994 and 1995 with those in 2000 and 2001. This short paper reports on some of the more interesting and unusual birds caught in the 2000 survey.

Morne Bleu

The study was conducted over two 5-day periods in July and August. Five 18 m long x 2.5m high North Ronaldsay mist nets of standard 33 mm mesh were erected each day at sites chosen at random from 30 mist net positions established along parallel transects cut at 50 m intervals through natural openings and shaded undergrowth. Netting took place from 06.00 through to 15.00 each day. Birds were identified by reference to ffrench 1991 and classified into three habitat categories: (1) forest interior, (2) forest edge, or (3) generalist, occurring in both the edge and interior of forests. Habitat classification followed that of Hayes and Samad (1998) or was from the author's own experience.

A total of 38 species were identified from 265 individuals captured. Of the 38 species 31 could be classified as forest species, 4 as edge species and 3 as generalists. The commonest species were the Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*, the Purple Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes caeruleus*, the Golden-headed Manakin *Pipra erythrocephala* and the Green Hermit hummingbird *Phaethornis guy*. One re-captured Golden-headed Manakin was first ringed in 1988.

One species of particular interest was the Brown Violetear *Colibri delphinae*, a locally distributed hummingbird, which is rarely caught as it forages mainly in the canopy. Other interesting captures were an Orange-billed Nightingale Thrush *Catharus aurantiirostris* and an Olive-striped Flycatcher *Mionectes olivaceous* both rare in Trinidad.

Simla

The study was conducted over two 6-day periods in July and August. Mist nets were used as described above. A total of 42 species were identified from 439 individuals captured. 28 were forest species, 10 edge species and 4 generalists. The larger number of edge species at Simla probably reflects the fact that the forest is more disturbed than at Morne Bleu. The commonest species caught were the Bananaquit, the Hairy Hermit hummingbird *Glaucis hirsuta*, the Semp *Euphonia violacea* and the Golden-headed Manakin. A Plain-brown Woodcreeper *Dendrocincla fuliginosa* ringed in 1987 was caught on two occasions in 2000.

A Bright-rumped Attila *Attila spadiceus*, which is uncommon and locally distributed, was caught. This species is known from forests and cocoa plantations in the Northern Range but had never been recorded at Simla before. One other notable capture was a male Tufted Coquette *Lophornis ornata*, a tiny but spectacular hummingbird with an extravagant chestnut crest, rufous neck tufts and iridescent golden green chin. The captured individual weighed only 2.4 g. The species is uncommon but widespread in Trinidad and can be very tame.

The information collected in 2000 and 2001 is currently being analysed and written up for publication. It is intended to visit and continue the survey in 2003 or 2004. As noted above, birds from the early years of the study are still being recaptured.

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Stewart White DEEB, IBLS Graham Kerr Building University of Glasgow Email:s.white@bio.gla.ac.uk

Bird identification corner

In *SBN* 63 we asked if members had their own formulae for separating species. Thanks are due to both Colin McLeod of Dundee and Mike Walton of Cupar who sent us these useful tips.

How to distinguish the calls of male Common Eiders and Atlantic Puffins

Of course, to those who have heard them, the two species sound quite different, but in Scotland, where both species are widespread, it is easy to forget that they are largely absent as breeders from most British coasts. Birdwatchers south of the border may not have had the chance to hear and compare them, and bird books always struggle to describe calls. But if they think of a lecherous Benny Hill "*Coo-w-orrr!*" for Puffin, and a rather camp Frankie Howerd "*Coo-w-ooh!*" for Eider, even novice birders who have never heard either species before will have no trouble identifying the calls.

Colin McLeod

How to separate female Goosanders and Red-breasted Mergansers

This is the one I devised for myself when beginning birdwatching. Based on the distinct boundary between the brown head and white body in Goosanders compared to the diffuse boundary in Mergansers, I remember them as GOOd Goosanders and MURky MERgansers.

Mike Walton

For sale

Original colour slides of birds. For a current list of species and prices send a SAE to: Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ. Tel: 0114-266 4362.

Abernethy - A painting by Chris Rose

Should you visit Harbour Point, you will see a new print of our emblem, a Crested Tit, hanging in the office. This wonderful limited edition print by Borders artist Chris Rose has been purchased by the SOC to mark the occasion of our move from Regent Terrace. Copies are now available to members directly from the SOC for just £30 and, with the agreement of the artist, 20% of this sum will be donated to the SOC. To order your copy directly from the SOC, please contact Bill Gardner, Development Manager. If you are unable to collect your print yourself, please add £3 for post and packing.

Chris describes for us the inspiration behind this picture. "Anyone visiting the Caledonian forests of Strathspey cannot fail to be captivated by their ancient charm. They possess a timeless quality and are steeped in an atmosphere of quiet mystery. The sounds of hidden birds and animals carry from deep within the forest - the bark of a deer or the drumming of a woodpecker - while closer to hand can be heard the thin "*tsee-tsee-tsee*" of Goldcrests, barely glimpsed as they busily flit through the pines. Nowhere else have I ever seen lichens in such profusion that they seem to literally drip from the branches and it is this almost fairy-tale landscape that provided the inspiration for this painting. Crested Tits are almost emblematic of these northern forests and are as much a part of them as the smell of damp pine needles on the forest floor and the latticework of lichen-encrusted twigs, which cloaks the trees like grey gauze.

I had plenty of sketches of Crested Tits that I could use for the picture but, having established the basic idea for the painting, I spent an entire day wandering through the Abernethy Forest trying to find the 'perfect branch'! One might assume that in a forest boasting several million lichen-laden branches this would be an easy task, but having already composed the picture in my head only a branch of just the right shape and aspect would do. Trudging wearily back to the car park at the end of a fruitless day's searching I saw my perfect branch not 50 feet from the car! A colour sketch was made and the artist retired, happy, to the nearest hostelry".

Chris Rose

41st Interregional Conference on Ornithology

Organised in Switzerland this year by "Nos Oiseaux", in collaboration with the "Société des science naturelles du pays de Porrentruy" (Society of Natural History of the Porrentruy region), it will take place in Porrentruy in the Canton of Jura on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th November 2002. The selected topic is the condition of the population of diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey in Europe.

The day of 22nd November will be devoted to pedagogical seminars on the topic "Face to face with ..." during which the Jurassian students will be able to converse with experienced ornithologists. Some recreative evenings with films will be held on Friday and Saturday. Saturday and Sunday will be devoted to scientific sessions. On this occasion several personalities who have played an important part in the study and preservation of birds of prey in Europe for many years will be given the official title of Honorary Member of the Conference.

Anybody interested in attending the Conference is welcome to do so. Associations of ornithology and nature conservation, specialised companies, as well as animal photographers and artists have the opportunity to display and sell their productions within the walls of the Conference and to take part in the different competitions that will be offered.

Anybody interested in participating in the Conference, in presenting a report or wishing to display the result of their work connected with the topic are welcome to forward their names to the Conference Management, details below.

Michel Juillard, Clos Gaspard,
2946 Miécourt, Switzerland.
Tel: 032/462.33.46.
Fax: 032/462.32.08.
E-mail: m.juillard@freesurf.ch

Results of SOC Questionnaire

A total of 324 Scottish resident members, plus eight living elsewhere, responded to the recent questionnaire. The analysis was restricted to those living in Scotland and was initially divided into three categories according to length of membership, i.e. members belonging to the Club for fewer than five years, 5-20 years and more than 20 years. An assumption was made that those with the longer membership were the older members. Of the respondents, numbers within these categories were 55, 129 and 138 respectively. Two respondents were unsure. The total represents approximately 20% of the total Scottish resident membership.

To the question regarding attendance at SOC branch meetings, 75% answered that they regularly or occasionally attended. The next question on attendance at branch outings revealed that 39% regularly or occasionally participated, while 40% attended outings of other bird Clubs. 42% regularly or occasionally attended SOC conferences, and there was an obvious age-related bias, since only 26% of newer

(younger?) members attended, rising to 57% for older members. There are clearly many reasons for non-attendance of Club events. Where reasons were given, the majority were due to distance from event or age and infirmity. Other reasons were other commitments, cost (of conferences) and, in some cases, the lack of branch outings.

The questions on the reading of SOC publications showed that these seem to be an important link between the Club and its members. 93% regularly read SBN and only 1% never read it. 77% and 76% respectively regularly read SB and SBR, with 4% and 3% never reading them. Readership of SBN and SB rises slightly with age. Although not available in some regions, 66% also regularly read their local bird reports.

The next group of questions referred to access to e-mail and the Internet. This is increasingly becoming the method by which contact is made by many organisations with their members. It is also becoming important in the development of surveys and recording. 61% of respondents currently have e-mail and/or Internet access. This will rise to 66% within the next two years. Understandably, this figure decreases with age, from 73% of newer members to 56% of older members. Of Internet users, 72% log on to the SOC website, mostly on an occasional basis. This also declines with age, from 82% to 62% by categories.

Also understandably, only 26% of respondents use the SOC library, mostly occasionally, with usage rising from 13% of newer members to 38% of older members. The impending move of SOC HQ and the library prompted 33% to answer that they would use the library more if it was nearer to them, while 20% would offer to help in HQ under the same circumstances. These figures may, however, have little value in view of the sketchiness of the questions and the final location of HQ.

The question regarding membership of other ornithological clubs and organisations revealed a wide variety of support. 49% of respondents also belong to the RSPB, while 42% are members of the BTO. 8% belonged to each of the SWT and Fife Bird Club, while 3% were members of the Shetland Bird Club and 2% of WWT.

While the questionnaire could not be construed to be statistically valid, it does reveal figures which the Club might find useful in its further development.

Norman Elkins

Requests

Sightings of colour-ringed European Shags

Since 1997 most of the young European Shags reared on the Isle of May have been individually colour-ringed by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (formerly ITE) Banchory and the Isle of May Bird Observatory, as part of a long-term study into the population dynamics of this internationally important seabird colony. Several hundred adults have also been marked to determine their over-winter survival. The rings are of a variety of colours (that denote year of hatching or breeding status) and virtually all have a unique three-letter code. A few older yellow rings have just two letters. Although we hope to find most of the birds that return to the island, documenting the survival of those that emigrate, or conceivably never breed, is more difficult. We are therefore keen to receive details of any sightings of colour-ringed Shags even from places as close to the Isle of May as Fife Ness. We promise a prompt response, with the histories of the birds concerned, to any reports. Details please to: **Mike Harris, CEH, Hill of Brathens, Banchory AB31 4BW; Tel. 01330 826355: Email: mph@ceh.ac.uk.**

House Sparrows in Edinburgh

Edinburgh Birdwatchers please note - House Sparrow records required. Any data, but especially counts of colonies or from gardens is required by an ecologist investigating the decline of the House Sparrow in Edinburgh. **Please contact Miriam Turner on 0131-229 5677 or 07740-339489, or by e-mail miriamturner@hotmail.com.**

Rare raptors' journey tracked on Net

Honey Buzzards from the Scottish Highlands are being tracked on the internet as part of a pioneering project to uncover the mysteries of the birds' annual journey south.

The Forestry Commission has joined forces with the Highland Foundation for Wildlife to trace the migration and wintering sites of the small population of Honey Buzzards which breeds in the forests of the north.

Two young Highland Honey Buzzards have been fitted with light-weight satellite transmitters and their progress can be followed through two linked websites www.forestry.gov.uk/birdlife and www.roydennis.org/honeybuzzard.htm.

Inverness Forest District manager David Jardine said the project would give fascinating new insight into the lives of these extremely rare birds, and help in meeting the needs of the Highland population. "We are delighted to be involved in funding this project which enables people to learn about these magnificent birds of prey, and follow their epic migration to equatorial Africa," he added.

The Honey Buzzard is an elusive raptor which breeds in small numbers in the UK and has very unusual feeding patterns. Despite being easily mistaken for a Common Buzzard, it is in fact not a member of the buzzard genus at all, and does not eat honey! Further information on Honey Buzzards is available on the website noted above.

From Forestry Commission News Release No 4320.

Contested Mountains

SOC member, Rob Lambert, has authored a new book, *Contested Mountains: Nature, Development and Environment in the Cairngorms Region of Scotland, 1880-1980. Contested Mountains* is an historical study of the extraordinary changes in attitudes to nature and the use of land in the Cairngorms region since 1880. The study looks at early visitor perceptions of the region and the history of rights of way disputes. It also presents an environmental history of the Osprey in Scotland, and the history and development of the Glenmore National Forest Park, the Aviemore tourist industry, the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve and the Cairngorms National Park ideal.

ISBN 1 874267 44 8, price £40 (320pp hardback) – available from booksellers or direct from the publisher (White Horse Press, Cambridge, UK. Tel: 01859 520204)

Slavonian Grebe update

As we went to press we received the latest Slavonian Grebe Newsletter from the RSPB North Scotland Office, covering the 2001 breeding season. This provides much interesting information, but in brief, the good news is that the 2001 season showed that the decline in both the numbers of pairs and young produced reversed the declines first noted in 1994. In 2001, 40 pairs were found on territory, raising 41 young. Other work covering predation, liaison with other grebe workers, trapping fish and marking some grebes is underway and reported in the newsletter. For further information, contact Stuart Benn, Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB Scotland, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW.

Letters to the Editor

Carrion Crow with white wings

Carrion Crows have nested in a neighbour's tree, about 30-40 feet from our boundary, for 25 years or longer. Two or three young usually fledge each year. The pair nesting this year had one chick only. It had white wings. During the next ten days I saw it on two occasions and a neighbour on two occasions also. She saw it about 300 yards from the house at the end of July and again in the gardens at the end of August. Long sustained flights were not observed - short flights only between neighbouring tree branches and shrubs. This the last sighting of which I know.

Allan Dunthorn, Aberdeen

Bird Names

When I opened *Scottish Bird News* Number 62 (June 2001) it finally sunk home to me that the SBRC have finally gone cuckoo (or should that be Common or Eurasian Cuckoo - I can't remember which?)

I refer of course to the decision to re-name many of our bird species on our behalf. All that will be achieved by this autocratic nonsense is total confusion.

Do we not have scientific names already in place in order to span language and cultural differences in names?

Do the SBRC believe that when one birder reports to another that he or she has seen a Waxwing or a Common Gull that the other does not fully understand which species is being referred to?

I have no problem with an American calling a Common Gull a "Mew Gull" but with the inclusion of a scientific name (as all proper articles and observations should) there is no confusion whatsoever and I suggest there never has been.

I saw some Knot while on holiday recently in Orkney but cannot recall whether they are now Great Knot or Red Knot. They looked just the same as the other Knot I have ever seen - neither were they particularly 'great' nor 'red' come to think.

I for one shall continue to name and report birds as I always have done and can I suggest that it is not too late for the SBRC to think again on their ludicrous and wholly unpopular mistake as most birders I [illegible] to are not "red-billed choughed!"

Stuart Craig, Glasgow

See update on names in the report from the Recorders' Conference elsewhere in this issue. Correspondence is now closed. (Ed.)

SOC NOTICES

New Honorary Members

In recognition of their long-standing commitment and contribution to the Club and to Scottish ornithology in general, Council has elected Frank Hamilton and Ray Murray honorary members of the Club.

Frank's association with the Club goes back more years than he probably cares to mention - as an active member, Council member and President (1990-93). Professionally, he also made a considerable contribution to ornithology working for RSPB Scotland, latterly as their Scottish Director until he retired. Now he has time to simply enjoy birdwatching!

Ray followed Frank to be Club President from 1993-96. He continues to contribute enormously to the Local Recorders' Network as Recorder for Borders, and as the de facto voice of that team, until agreeing to chair the new Recorders' Committee last year. As editor of the Scottish Bird Report since 1992, Ray has developed this Club publication into the authoritative document it is today.

Nominations for Council

Nominations for one new Council member is required to replace Ken Shaw who retires by rotation at this year's AGM in November. Nominations should be made in writing with a proposer and seconder and should be sent to: Hon. Secretary, The SOC, Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh EH21 6SJ no later than 31 July 2002.

Council meets between two and four times a year, in the evenings. Previously meetings were held in Regent Terrace, but we now plan to change the venue between meetings to assist members who live at a distance from Edinburgh. This is your chance to influence the future direction of the Club, and all who join Council have found it very rewarding.

Scottish Birds Records Committee - Election of New Member

One member of SBRC retires annually by rotation and Bruce Forrester was due to retire this year. Bruce unfortunately did not live to complete his term of office, dying in February after a short illness (an obituary will appear in *Scottish Birds*).

Nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to Ron Forrester (address below) by 31st July, signed by a proposer and a seconder, who must both be SOC members. If there is more than one nomination, a postal ballot shall take place in which all SOC Local Recorders will have one vote.

In order to ensure that there is a replacement SBRC always put forward a nomination and on this occasion Angus Murray is our candidate. Like Bruce, Angus (age 34) is from Ayrshire and will be known to most active Scottish birders. By running Birdline Scotland since 1990 he has gained perhaps an unrivalled knowledge of observers throughout the country and is also one of Scotland's most active birders. Angus has an extensive experience of rare and unusual birds, seeing over 350 species in Scotland and 460 in Britain. He has travelled widely abroad in search of birds, including North America, Africa, many European countries and has made three trips to Asia. He has seen all of the species on the SBRC List. Angus also has experience of record assessment, having retired by rotation after completing a term on the Ayrshire Local Records Panel and has always had a keen interest in identification matters.

As is always the case we encourage additional nominations.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ

Waterston Library News

John Ballantyne has indicated that he wishes to step down as our Archivist due to increasing work commitments, and being away from Edinburgh for several months at a time. In consequence we are urgently seeking someone to take over this honorary rôle.

The archive collection consists in the main of notebooks, journals, records, sound recordings and correspondence of ornithological importance. It has been consulted widely by many researchers in recent years. There is a computerised catalogue of the material.

John has done a splendid job in sorting and cataloguing the collection but there is always more to do: in particular much photographic material requires attention. Anyone interested in helping with the archive should contact Caroline Scott on 0131-653-0653.

Finally a very special thank you to John on behalf of the Club for all his labours over the past years. He has done a really first class job in organising and promoting the collection so that many more people are now aware of our important holdings.

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 2001 were: **July 1st** £30 – T.D. Dobson, Galashiels; **2nd** £20 – Mrs S.M.Wilson, Stirling; **3rd** £10 – P.J.Sellar, Surrey.
August 1st £50 – W. McKechnie, Cumnock; **2nd** £30 – Miss S.M. McCulloch, Edinburgh;

Jack Snipe at Fife Ness by Eric McCabe

3rd £20 – Dr M. McIntyre, St Andrews; **4th** £10 – J.S. Wilson, Glasgow.
September 1st £50 – Miss B.J. Cain, Beeswing; **2nd** £20 – A. Shepherd, Dundee; **3rd** £10 – S.F. Jackson, Falmouth.

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair
As usual, the SOC will have a stand at the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair at Vane Farm near Kinross on Saturday 31st August and Sunday 1st September. Everyone is welcome to come and meet staff and members of the Club, and find out about our activities - you will be made most welcome. We hope some new members will be enticed as well. If you know someone who may be interested, bring them along and introduce them to the oldest and largest bird club in Scotland.

2002 SOC Annual Conference - Newtonmore 1st-3rd November
Advance notice of the Club's annual autumn conference - full details and application forms will be mailed with the next *SBN*.

We will meet again in the Balavil Sport Hotel in Newtonmore on Friday 1st November, and again the conference offers the chance for Club members to meet like-minded friends old and new. The new SOC Conference working group (Joan Howie of Stewartry branch, Vicky McLellan of Borders branch, and Brian Smith of Dumfries branch) have compiled a programme with an island theme and speakers booked include Ian Darling, Roy Dennis, Bill Gardner, Richard Hesketh, Angus Hogg and Ian Mitchell. In addition, Duncan Watt will be painting for us on the Saturday afternoon after delegates have the chance for some local birdwatching, and before the AGM.

Photographic competition results
The winner of the 2001 Photographic Competition held at the 2001 Annual Conference was Eric McCabe. His winning shot, voted by members present at the meeting, was of a Jack Snipe taken at Fife Ness.

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to; **Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh, Lothian EH21 6SJ** no later than 1 October 2002. Subjects must be live wild birds photographed in Scotland and with appropriate licences as required. They should be clearly marked with photographers name, the species and locality. All entries will be returned as soon as possible after the conference.

Proposed SOC trip to St Kilda 2003
To mark the publication of the updated booklet on the status of birds on St. Kilda, the Club is considering chartering Bob Theakston and the *Poplar Voyager* from Oban for one or more one-week slots in May-June 2003, with the aim of visiting St. Kilda. It is anticipated that at least one of the proposed trips will be lead by former warden and author Stuart Murray. The cost will be in the order of £800 for 7 nights full board, with 10 berths onboard. The exact itinerary will be subject to weather conditions.

At this early stage, we would simply like to assess the level of interest in such a trip, and would encourage those seriously interested to contact HQ by phone, mail or e-mail. Depending on the level of interest, we may run more than one trip, but even so we suspect that demand will be high. Please note that this initial interest list will have no bearing on the final booking priorities, it is just to assess numbers.

Full details will be circulated with the September mailing.

REVIEWS

Raptors of the World. *Ferguson-Lees J and Christie DA. A Helm Identification Guide. Published by Christopher Helm: London 2001. ISBN 0-7136-8026-1. £49.00.*

As the authors acknowledge this book was originally intended as a field guide, but during the 18 years of its writing it grew to its final impressive size. It is almost 1000 pages long, 64 mm thick and weighs 2.5 kilograms - certainly not a pocket book. However, all 313 species of the world's species are described. It will no doubt become the handbook for world raptors.

The book begins with a list of the species in a semi taxonomic order - giving their English name and Latin binomial. Introductory sections cover such topics as raptor topography, measurements, sex and age differences, identification, moult and age, plumage and taxonomy. The bulk of the book is divided into two main sections. The first is the plates, 112 of them, with over 2000 individual colour illustrations of perched or flying birds. The three illustrators, Kim Franklin, David Mead and Philip Burton have done an impressive job. Opposite each plate is a summary of the biometrics and identification features, with a map in colour showing the world distribution of the species indicating the breeding and wintering ranges of migrant species. There then follows almost 600 pages of text with distribution maps - larger but in black and white - and some further illustrative black and white drawings. The text is divided into sections covering distribution, movements, habitat, field characters, "confusion species", voice, food, socio-sexual behaviour, breeding, population, geographical variation, measurements and references.

It is therefore a hybrid book: a field guide (but too big to carry around) and an authoritative reference work. For an individual species it obviously cannot compete with the various monographs or detailed treatises such as BWP. Similarly some of the field guides specific to particular world regions are more detailed. However, this book covers all of the recognised raptor species of the world.

At £49 this book will be worth every penny to the raptor enthusiast and is a must for their bookshelf. For those who are likely to travel to less well-known regions of the world with no good field guide it will be well worth carrying (but you may incur some charges for excess baggage).

Ian R Poxton
Member of Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group

***Sylvia* Warblers: identification, taxonomy and phylogeny of the genus Sylvia.** *Shirihai, Gargallo, Helbig, Harris and Cottridge. 2001. 576pp. 116 colour plates. Many maps and b + w figures. ISBN 0 7136 3984 9. £60 hardback.*

The title is surprisingly modest for such a hyped book: for your £60, in addition to the promises on the cover, you also get ecology, ethology and biogeography of Sylvias, and a summary of the remarkable work by Helbig and others on the genetics of migration strategies in this genus. Each of the 22 species or superspecies (more about them later) gets a comprehensive going-over: for the birders, there are full descriptions of all the species and subspecies, together with field characters, voice, jizz and handy summaries and hints for separation of each from similar confusion species; for ringers, in-hand descriptions and comprehensive, referenced, biometrics; for the scientists and armchair taxonomists, there are explanations of the systematic positions of all taxa; and for the coffee table, the most superb set of photos and plates. The professionalism of the 'job done' can't be faulted.

Species accounts are divided into an introduction, followed by 'Field Identification' (with colour plates), 'Voice' (with sonograms, thank goodness!), 'Identification in the Hand', 'Taxonomy', 'Moult, Age and Sex', 'General Biology and Ecology', 'Population Size and Trends', an appendix with piles of biometrics and up to eight plates of photos. It is almost a shame that the book has hit the headlines for its taxonomic review of Sylvias, since it detracts from the enormous amounts of work that went into producing all those biometrics, descriptions, photographs and moult diagrams. Nevertheless, it has to be said that the authors have driven a truck through the taxonomy of the group, abolishing many described subspecies and splitting others as new species. Their decisions look sensible, but only time will tell whether they will be accepted – there is currently probably no one around with the expertise or courage to challenge them. The authors adopt the Biological Species Concept (BSC), and have used, controversially, the 'allospecies' category. All these new 'allospecies' are previously described subspecies, which the authors believe are different enough to merit specific recognition, but which cannot be proven to be reproductively isolated because their ranges do not overlap (allopatric). Allospecies are contained within a superspecies'. Hence instead of the old Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* with an African race *S. n. deserti* and an Asian race *S. n.* [illegible] we now have two allospecies, the [illegible] and Asian Desert Warblers that [illegible] form a superspecies, *S.* [*nana*].

Similarly, Orphean Warblers are split into Eastern and Western allospecies, Balearic Warbler is split from Marmora's Warbler, and, more tentatively, Lesser Whitethroat and Subalpine Warbler have both become superspecies with 4 allospecies each.

Will people understand allospecies or accept them as part of their birding life? Under the BSC we will always face situations where we think a particular race of bird deserves to be recognised as a species, but we cannot prove it. Giving our ignorance a fancy name – allospecies – does not increase the sum of human knowledge.

Whether taxonomy rings your bell or not, we have here an authoritative work on the genus that will not soon be surpassed. It seems a bit gung-ho at times: the publication of an article in *BB* about Marmora's and Balearic Warblers that was based on the book chapter (2001. *Brit. Birds* 94: 160-190) engendered responses that revealed inaccuracies and some apparently unfair dismissal of records by competent observers. The book might well therefore contain lots of minor irritating flaws, but few people will not benefit from owning it.

Martin Collinson

The Birds of Ecuador *by Robert S. Ridgely and Paul J. Greenfield 2001. Christopher Helm. Volume 2: 740 pages, 96 colour plates and 1,596 maps. Softback, £55. ISBN 0-7126-6117-8 Two volume set available at £80.*

I have been fortunate to make two birding trips to Ecuador. On each occasion the lack of a comprehensive field guide to the country with good illustrations was somewhat of a disadvantage. I and many others before me have had to make do with the *Birds of Colombia* and *The Birds of the High Andes* or cobble together one's own field guide using colour copies from a variety of sources. To the author's eternal credit, this superb new volume has filled one more gap in South American ornithology. I anticipate that it will encourage many new birders to explore this exceptionally species-rich country.

It should be noted that this work comprises two volumes. Volume 1 deals with status, distribution and taxonomy in some depth and Volume 2, the field guide, deals with identification and is covered by this review.

Any new field guide is judged primarily on the quality and accuracy of the illustrations. I am sure you will not be disappointed as to my eye, they are excellent. Paul Greenfield, the artist, has done a brilliant job in illustrating nearly all of the 1600 bird species which occur in mainland Ecuador with as much plumage variation as seems appropriate. Many are richly coloured reflecting the stunning plumage of so many species. Opposite each colour plate is a fully cross-referenced key containing the main identification points and a few words on status and distribution.

The species accounts are very concise and include a description of the species, a valuable comment on similar species, and habits and voice. Distribution maps have been created for each species and portray with a reasonable degree of accuracy the generalised range, using shading and dots for isolated records. The main altitudinal range is appended to each map. The authors fully appreciate the limitations of these maps and admit that some will be out of date the moment they are published. The companion volume has more details on distribution.

A single page short index to some of the common family, genus and group names is invaluable for quick reference. I would prefer to have had it printed on the back cover of the book. With so many similar looking families such as the tyrant flycatchers, furnarids, antbirds etc. etc., speed in locating the right plate is sometimes essential for making a correct identification before the birds disappear from view.

Looking at the perfect binding of this weighty volume, I wonder how robust it will be for constant field use? It will not be the first field guide of its type to come apart. But I do appreciate that it is bound this way to keep the cost down.

All in all, a splendid book and a worthy addition to any birder's bookshelf and essential for a trip to Ecuador and adjacent countries.

David Clugston

Scottish Birds: Culture and Tradition. *Robin Hull. 2001. The Mercat Press, Edinburgh. pp 303 Text illustrations. Index. ISBN 184183 0259 Price £12.99*

This book is seen by the author as a companion to the available field guides. It is in two parts. The first of 76 pages is to me the more interesting and consists of a chronological account of the ever changing relationship between man and birds in Scotland. Each century has its own chapter and although the information is somewhat brief, nevertheless it provides a good overview of each period. The second part deals with 195 of the most common Scottish Birds. It lists the Scots and Gaelic names, a brief history of the species, a quotation from Scottish literature and a final paragraph covering the influence of the species on tradition,

mythology or folklore. Some of the statements concerning current distribution are inaccurate, i.e. "Grasshopper Warbler is rare" or "Grey Wagtails are seldom seen during the winter." It is well referenced throughout to a fairly comprehensive and valuable bibliography. A useful addition to Scottish ornithological literature.

David Clugston

RECENT REPORTS: January to April 2002 - an overview of winter 2002.

Baillon's Crake, Shetland, Oct 2001

There is no doubt whatsoever that the bird of the winter period was the now famous first-winter **Snowy Egret** present throughout in SW Scotland (long awaited first record for Britain). Probably present from the 29th Oct 2001 at Balvicar on the Isle of Seil (Argyll), it was first identified there on the 5th Nov. It remained at Balvicar, favouring a tidal creek opposite the village store, until the 25th Nov. Remarkably though it was then seen at Brodick on Arran (Clyde Islands) on 3rd Dec before being relocated in Ayrshire at Ardrossan north beach on 22nd-23rd, then present nearby at Stevenston from 26th where it favoured the small burn at Ardeer golf course where it performed magnificently to its constant stream of admirers over the Christmas/New Year period. It ended its Ayrshire leg of its sojourn on this side of the Atlantic on 9th Jan when it was seen again at Ardrossan. It then saw out the remainder of the winter on Arran mostly in the Brodick area, being present there from 13th Jan - 28th Mar. It was then amazingly relocated again in Argyll initially at Loch Fyne from 29th Mar - 3rd Apr before it returned to its favourite tidal creek at Balvicar on Seil on 4th where it remained to the end of the month. Now it is "over here" it looks like it has no immediate intention of leaving and could become a permanent fixture. It certainly looks like it may well summer at Balvicar. In the whole history of British twitching there has probably never been a more obliging first for Britain and over its six month stay an estimated 3 - 4000 people have been to see it. What can be said with certainty, that through its extreme approachability it is probably the most photographed rarity of all time.

Snowy Egret by Bill Jackson

Listeners to *Birdline Scotland* over the winter had no shortage of other rarities to listen to. After three **Ivory Gulls** seen in Nov/Dec 2001 the gull highlight of 2002 was the adult or second-winter **Ross's Gull** at Peterhead (NE Scotland) on 9th - 11th Mar (seventh record for region) whilst following a first winter **American Herring Gull** on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 7th Jan up to five different first winters and one probable second winter were reported from Benbecula and South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 20th Jan -28th Apr. Other gull highlights, in a generally good winter for white-winged gulls in Scotland, included an adult summer **Bonaparte's Gull** on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 28th Apr, five **Ring-billed Gulls** in the period including the adult back for its fifteenth winter at Stromness (Orkney), up to ten **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported, eight **Kumlien's Gulls** were seen including an adult at Millichen Flood, Glasgow on 20th Jan and amongst **Mediterranean Gull** reports, four, all adults, at Musselburgh (Lothian) on 10th Feb is a Scottish record count. Amongst wildfowl the highlights included a drake **Lesser Scaup** at Loch Insh on 29th -30th Mar (first for Highland recording area), three **Red-breasted Geese** (one on Islay (Argyll) until 9th Apr at least, and one in the Loch Leven area (Kinross/Fife) on 15th Feb - 30th Apr with a second bird reported at Loch Leven on 7th Apr), up to six **Snow Geese** were reported in a good showing and four **King Eiders** were seen in a return to form for the species; two on Shetland, female again at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) from 20th Apr and a popular drake at Dunstaffnage (Argyll) from 6th Apr. Twelve **Garganey** were seen from 31st Mar.

It has been a fantastic early spring period for **Common Crane** with a confusing series of reports in Mar and Apr making it hard to work out how many birds were seen. Up to 13 were seen in March with 14 reported in April. Although tainted with escape connotations these days up to two **White Storks** were seen in April with good credentials as regards their origin. One was on Orkney from 8th - at least 12th with probably a second bird in NE Scotland from 14th, seen in Moray on 24th and then over North Ronaldsay on 25th before being seen on Fair Isle the next day. Two **Little Egrets** were seen in April - at Wigtown Bay (Dumfries and Galloway) on 14th and at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 21st -24th whilst a **Great White Egret** on Shetland mainland on 23rd - 25th Apr was only the third record for Shetland. A moulting adult **White-billed Diver** was found at Gairloch (Highland) on 3rd Mar, it was seen again on 18th with a further two seen in April on Orkney and Shetland. It was a brilliant period for **Gyr Falcon** in Scotland though actually trying to connect with one gets no easier. Up to nine were reported from 6th Jan with long staying white morphs on Islay (Argyll) on at least 22nd Feb - 21st Mar and on Orkney (2) on 1st Mar - 15th Apr, with in an unprecedented sighting the two birds seen together at Rendall, north Mainland on the 15th Apr. A **Hobby** was reported near Annan (Dumfries and Galloway) on 29th Apr, a **Quail** reported near Montrose (Angus) on 30th Apr and the first **Corncrake** back on Coll (Argyll) on 18th Apr.

A **Dotterel** was seen on Mull (Argyll) on 29th Apr whilst also in April a winter plumaged **Pacific Golden Plover** was on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 7th - 14th and a **Greater Yellowlegs** was nearby on St Kilda on 28th - 30th whilst at least six **Avocets** were seen in Scotland in April, the first since 1999. Two parties of three arrived on the 4th - at Invergowrie Bay (Angus/Perthshire) and at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) (the two groups were seen at the same time). The Invergowrie birds were still present on the 5th whilst, presumably the Fife group, were then seen

at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NE Scotland) on 6th where one of the birds was seen to be colour-ringed. This group were then relocated at Pool of Virkie (Shetland) on 10th remaining until the 15th. The colour-ringed bird was ringed as a chick in 1997 at Trimley Marshes (Suffolk). Also in April two **Little Ringed Plovers** were at Carbarns Pool (Lanarkshire) on 24th - 28th whilst one was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 28th whilst an early **Wood Sandpiper** was reported at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 26th. Arguably though the main wader event of April was the record-breaking numbers of Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits** seen. 350 at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 21st built up to a flock of 495 there on 24th easily a Scottish record count. Around the same time record counts were reached at two traditional sites for the species with 380 on the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 22nd and 290 the same day at WWT Caerlaverock (Dumfries and Galloway).

It was also a record breaking early spring in Scotland this year with most species being seen around a week to ten days earlier than normal. Examples of early dates include in March an unprecedented 15+ **Swallows** being seen in Scotland by the end of the month including the earliest ever on the Outer Hebrides on 29th, the earliest ever on Shetland also on the 29th and the earliest ever on Fair Isle on 31st. Also on 7th Apr the earliest ever **Grasshopper Warbler** to be recorded in Scotland was seen on Fair Isle whilst a **Cuckoo** on South Uist on 29th Mar (if accepted) would be only the second ever seen in Scotland in Mar. An **Osprey** at SWT Loch of the Lowes (Perthshire) on 19th Mar was the earliest ever seen on the reserve though it was not one of last year's breeding pair.

With good numbers of early migrants reported rarities were to be expected and on the 9th Apr *Birdline Scotland* broadcast the earliest ever **Subalpine Warbler** to be seen in Scotland - a first-summer male of the western form on North Ronaldsay (Orkney). The bird was still present the next day with, in a very good early spring there, also on North Ronaldsay a **Firecrest** was present on 2nd - 3rd - first ever spring record for Orkney. Another was trapped at St Abbs Head (Borders) on 20th Apr whilst one at Keills on 12th - 13th Mar was only the fifth record for Argyll. Also at St Abbs Head a **Red-rumped Swallow** was seen briefly on 23rd Apr whilst two **Hoopoes** were reported in April - at Stewarton (Ayrshire) on 4th and on Islay on 12th. A female **Red-spotted Bluethroat** was on Fair Isle on 19th -20th Apr (the earliest ever red-spot seen there) whilst a **Little Bunting** was present there on 30th Apr. A male **Two-barred Crossbill** was reported at Abernethy Forest RSPB reserve on 12th Apr - second record for Highland after one in 1959 if accepted. It was a much quieter **Waxwing** winter after the huge invasion of last year but it was a very good winter for **Great Grey Shrike** with at least ten different individuals reported.

Angus Murray.

Great Grey Shrike by Harry Scott

Next *Scottish Bird News*

Deadlines for the next issue of *Scottish Bird News*, due in September, should be sent to *SBN* c/o SOC, Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh EH21 6SJ by no later than 15th July. Ideally, contributions, both written and illustrations or photographs, should be sent electronically on floppy disk or via e-mail to mail@the-soc.org.uk.

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Scottish Bird News

Edited by: Martin Collinson & Mark Holling

Assisted by: Caroline Scott & Bill Gardner

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
Harbour Point, Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh, East Lothian EH21 6SJ.
Tel: 0131 653 0653
Fax: 0131 653 0654
E-mail: mail@the-soc.org.uk

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

Now, 66 years on, in 2002, the Club has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. ***www.the-soc.org.uk***

Passwords to access members' web pages: 'snowy' & 'egret'